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THE BOOKS OF

ISAIAH AND JEREMIAH

ISAIAH, CHAPS. XLIX. TO LXVI.

JEREMIAH

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN

D.D., Litt. D.

NEW YORK

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FEEDING IN THE WAYS

'They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.'
ISAIAH xlix. 9.

THIS is part of the prophet's glowing description of the return of the Captives, under the figure of a flock fed by a strong shepherd. We have often seen, I suppose, a flock of sheep driven along a road, some of them hastily trying to snatch a mouthful from the dusty grass by the wayside. Little can they get there; they have to wait until they reach some green pasture in which they can be folded. This flock shall 'feed in the ways'; as they go they will find nourishment. That is not all; the top of the mountains is not the place where grass grows. *There* are bare, savage cliffs, from which every particle of soil has been washed by furious torrents, or the scanty vegetation has been burnt up by the fierce 'sunbeams like swords.' There the wild deer and the ravens live, the sheep feed down in the valleys. But '*their* pasture shall be in all high places.' The literal rendering is even more emphatic: 'Their pasture shall be in all *bare heights*,' where a sudden verdure springs to feed them according to their need. Whilst, then, this prophecy is originally intended simply to suggest the abundant supplies that were to be provided for the band of exiles as they came back from Babylon, there lie in it great and blessed principles which belong to the Christian pilgrimage, and the flock that follows Christ.

They who follow Him, says my text, to begin with, shall find in the dusty paths of common life, and in all the smallnesses and distractions of daily duty, nourishment for their spirits. Do you remember what Jesus said? 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.' We, too, may have the same meat to eat which the world knows not of, and He will give that hidden manna to the combatant as well as 'to him that overcometh.' In the measure in which 'we follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,' in that measure do we find—like the stores of provisions that Arctic explorers come upon, *cachéd* for them—food in the wilderness, and nourishment for our highest life in our common work. That is a great promise, and it is a great duty.

It is a promise the fulfilment of which is plainly guaranteed by the very nature of the case. Religion is meant to direct conduct, and the smallest affairs of life are to come under its imperial control, and the only way by which a man can get any good out of his Christianity is by living it. It is when he sets to work on the principles of the Gospel that the Gospel proves itself to be a reality in his blessed experience. It is when he does the smallest duties from the great motives that these great motives are strengthened by exercise, as every motive is. If you wish to weaken the influence of any principle upon you, do not work it out, and it will wither and die. If a man would grasp the fulness of spiritual sustenance which lies in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, let him go to work on the basis of the Gospel, and he 'shall feed in the ways,' and common duties will minister strength to him instead of taking strength from him. We can make the smallest

daily incidents subserve our growth and our spiritual strength, because, if we thus do them, they will bring to us attestations of the reality of the faith by which we act on them. For convincing a man that a life-buoy is reliable there is nothing like having had experience of its power to hold his head above the waves when he has been cast into them. *Live* your Christianity, and it will attest itself. There will come, besides that, the blessed memory of past times in which we trusted in the Lord and were lightened, we obeyed God and found His promises true, we risked all for God and found that we had all more abundantly. It is only an active Christian life that is a nourished and growing Christian life.

The food which God gives us is not only to be taken by faith, but it has to be made ours more abundantly by work. Saint Augustine said in another connection, 'Believe, and thou hast eaten.' Yes, that is blessedly true, but it needs to be supplemented by 'they shall feed *in the ways*,' and their work will bring them nourishment.

But this is a great duty as well as a great promise. How many of us Christian people have but little experience of getting nearer to God because of our daily occupations? To by far the larger number of us, in by far the greater space of time in our lives, our daily work is a distraction, and tends to obscure the face of God to us and to shut us out from many of the storehouses of sustenance by which a quiet, contemplative faith is refreshed. Therefore we need times of special prayer and remoteness from daily work; and there will be very little realisation of the nourishing power of common duties unless there is familiar to us also the

entrance into the 'secret place of the Most High,' where He feeds His children on the bread of life.

We must not neglect either of these two ways by which our souls are fed, and we must ever remember that the reason why so many Christian people cannot set to their seal that this promise is true, lies mainly in this, that the ways on which they go are either not the ways that the Shepherd has walked in before them, or that they are trodden in forgetfulness of Him and without looking to His guidance. The work that is to minister to the Christian life must be work conformed to the Christian ideal, and if we fling ourselves into our secular business, as it is called—if you go to your counting-houses and shops, and I go to my desk and books, and forget the Shepherd—then there is no grass by the wayside for such sheep. But if we subject our wills to Him, and if in all that we do we are trying to refer to Him and are working in dependence on Him, and for Him, then the poorest work, the meanest, the most entirely secular, will be a source of Christian nourishment and blessing. We have to settle for ourselves whether we shall be distracted, torn asunder by pressure of cares and responsibilities and activities, or whether, far below the agitated surface which is ruffled by the winds, and borne along by the tidal wave, there will be a great central depth, still but not stagnant—whether we shall be fed, or starved in our Christian life, by the pressure of our worldly tasks. The choice is before us. 'They shall feed in the ways,' if the ways are Christ's ways, and He is at every step their Shepherd.

Further, my text suggests that for those who follow the Lamb there shall be greenness and pasture on the

bare heights. Strip that part of our text of its metaphor, and it just comes to the blessed old thought, which I hope many of us have known to be a true one, that the times of sorrow are the times when a Christian may have the most of the presence and strength of God. 'In the days of famine they shall be satisfied,' and up among the most barren cliffs, where there is not a bite for any four-footed creature, they shall find springing grass and watered pastures. Our prophet puts the same thought, under a kindred though somewhat different metaphor, in another place in this book, where he says, 'I will open rivers in high places.' That is clean contrary to nature. The rivers do not run on the mountain-tops, but down in the low ground. But for us, as the darkness thickens, the pillar may glow the brighter; as the gloom increases, the glory may grow; the less of nutriment or refreshment earth affords, the more abundantly does God spread His stores before us, if we are wise enough to take them. It is an experience, I suppose, common to all devout men, that their times of most rapid growth were their times of trouble. In nature winter stops all vegetable life. In grace the growing time is the winter. They tell us that up in the Arctic regions the reindeer will scratch away the snow, and get at the succulent moss that lies beneath it. When that Shepherd, Who Himself has known sorrows, leads us up into those barren regions of perpetual cold and snow, He teaches us, too, how to brush it away, and find what we need buried and kept safe and warm beneath the white shroud. It is the prerogative of the Christian soul not to be without trouble, but to turn the trouble into nourishment, and to feed on the barest heights.

May I turn these latter words of our text a somewhat different way, attaching to them a meaning which does not belong to them, but by way of accommodation? If Christian people want to have the bread of God abundantly, they must climb. It is to those who live on the heights that provision comes according to their need. If you would have your Christian life starved, go down into the fertile valleys. Remember Abraham and Lot, and the choice which each made. The one said: 'I want cattle and wealth, and I am going down to Sodom. Never mind about the vices of the inhabitants. There is money to be made there.' Abraham said: 'I am going to stay up here on the heights, the breezy, barren heights,' and God stayed beside him. If we go down we starve our souls. If we desire them to be fat and flourishing, nourished with the hidden manna, then we must go up. 'Their pasture shall be in all high places.'

Before I finish, let me remind you of the application of the words of my text, which we owe to the New Testament. The context runs, as you will remember, 'they shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them. For He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.' And you remember the beautiful variation and deepening of this promise in that great saying which the Seer in the Apocalypse gives us, when he speaks of those 'who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,' and are led 'by living fountains of water,' where 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' So we are entitled to believe that on the loftiest heights, far above this valley of weeping, there shall be immortal food, and that on the

high places of the mountains of God there shall be pasture that never withers. The prophet Ezekiel has a similar variation of my text, and transfers it from the captives on their march homewards, to the happy pilgrims who have reached home, when he says: 'I will bring them unto their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel' — when they have reached them at last after the weary march—'I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.'

THE MOUNTAIN ROAD

'And I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be exalted.'—ISAIAH xlix. 11.

THIS grand prophecy is far too wide to be exhausted by the return of the exiles. There gleamed through it the wider redemption and the true return of the real captives. The previous promises all find their fulfilment in the experiences of the soul on its journey back to God. Here we have two characteristics of that journey.

I. The Path through the mountains.

'*My* mountains.' That is the claim that all the world is His; and also the revelation that He is the Lord of Providence. He makes our difficult and steep places. Submission comes with that thought, and even 'for the strength of the hills we bless Thee.' There are mountains which are not His but ours, artificial difficulties of our own creating.

1. Our way does lie over the mountains. There are difficulties. The Christian course is like a Roman road which never turned aside, but went straight up and on.

So much the better. A keener air blows, bracing and health-giving, up there. Mosquitoes and malaria keep to the lower levels.

2. There is always a path over the mountains. Some way opens when we get close up, like a path through heather, which is not seen till reached. We walk by faith. We foolishly forebode and fancy that we cannot live if something happens, but there is no *cul de sac* in our paths if God's mountain-way is our way, nor does the faint track ever die out if our faith is keen-sighted and docile.

II. The Pasture on the mountains—lit. 'bare heights.'

Pastures in the East are down in bottoms, not, like ours, upon the hills. But this flock finds supplies on the barren hill-tops.

Sustenance in Sorrow and Loss.

1. Promise that whatever be our trials and losses we shall be taken care of. Not, perhaps, as we should have liked, nor as abundantly fed as down in the valleys, but still not left to starve. No carcases strewed on the bleakest bit of road as one sees dead camels by the side of the tracks in the desert.

2. Promise of sustenance of a higher kind even in sorrow. The Alpine flora is specially beautiful, though minute. The blessings of affliction; the more intimate knowledge of His love, submission of will. 'Out of the eater came forth meat.'

'Passing through the valley of weeping they make it a well'; the tears shed in times of rightly borne sorrow are gathered into a reservoir from which refreshment, patience, trust and strength may be drawn in later days.

But the perfect fulfilment of the promise lies beyond

this life. 'On the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be,' and they who have found pasture on the barren heights of earthly sorrow shall 'summer high in bliss upon the hills of God,' and shall at once both lie 'for ever in a good fold,' and 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,' and find fountains of living water bursting forth for ever on these fertile heights.

THE WRITING ON GOD'S HANDS

'Behold! I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me.'—ISAIAH xlix. 16.

IN the preceding context we have the infinitely tender and beautiful words: 'Zion hath said, The Lord hath forsaken me. Can a woman forget her sucking child? . . . yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' There is more than a mother's love in the Father's heart. But wonderful in their revelation of God, and mighty to strengthen, calm, and comfort, as these transcendent words are, those of my text, which follow them, do not fall beneath their loftiness. They are a singularly bold metaphor, drawn from the strange and half-savage custom, which lingers still among sailors and others, of having beloved names or other tokens of affection and remembrance indelibly inscribed on parts of the body. Sometimes worshippers had the marks of the god thus set on their flesh; here God writes on His hands the name of the city of His worshippers. And it is not its name only, but its very likeness that He stamps there, that He may ever look on it, as those who love bear with them a picture of one dear face. The prophecy goes on: 'Thy walls are continually before Me,' but in the prophet's time the walls were in ruins, and yet they are present to the divine mind.

I. Now, the first thought suggested by these great words is that here we have set forth for our strength and peace a divine remembrance, tender as—yea, more tender than—a mother's.

When Israel came out of Egypt, the Passover was instituted as 'a memorial unto all generations,' or, as the same idea is otherwise expressed, 'it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand.' Here God represents Himself as doing for Israel what He had bid Israel do for Him. They were, as it were, to write the supreme act of deliverance in the Exodus upon their hands, that it might never be forgotten. He writes Zion on His hands for the same purpose.

Now, of course, the text does not primarily refer to individuals, but to the community, whether Zion is understood, as the prophet understood the name, to be ancient Israel, or as the Christian Church. But the recognition of that fact should not be allowed to rob us of the preciousness of this text in its bearing on the individual. For God remembers the community, not as an abstraction or a generalised expression, but as the aggregate of all the individuals composing it. We lose sight of the particulars when we generalise. We cannot see the trees for the wood. We think of 'the Church,' and do not think of the thousands of men and women who make it up. We cannot discern the separate stars in the galaxy. But God's eye resolves what to us is a nebula, and to Him every single glittering point of light hangs rounded and separate in the heaven. Therefore this assurance of our text is to be taken by every single soul that loves God, and trusts Him through Jesus Christ, as belonging to it, as though there were not another creature on earth but itself.

'The sun whose beams most glorious are,
Disdaineth no beholder.'

Its light floods the world, yet seems to go straight into the eyeball of every man that looks at it. And such is the divine love and remembrance. There is no jostling nor confusion in the wide space of the heart of God. They that go before shall not hinder them that come after. The hungry crowd sat down in companies on the green grass, and the first fifty, no doubt, were envied by the last of the hundred fifties that made up the five thousand, and wondered whether the five loaves and the two small fishes could go round, but the last fed full as did the first. The great promise of our text belongs to me and thee, and therefore belongs to us all.

That remembrance which each man may take for himself—and we are poor Christians if we do not live in its light—is infinitely tender. The echo of the music of the previous words still haunts the verse, and the remembrance promised in it is touched with more than a mother's love. 'I am poor and needy,' says the Psalmist, 'yet the Lord thinketh upon me.' He might have said, 'I am poor and needy, therefore the Lord thinketh upon me.' That remembrance is in full activity when things are darkest with us. Israel said, 'My Lord hath forgotten me,' because at the point of view taken in the second half of Isaiah, it was captive in a far-off land. You and I sometimes are brought into circumstances in which we are ready to think 'God has, somehow or other, left me, has forgotten me.' Never! never! However mirk the night, however apparently solitary the way, however mysterious and insoluble the difficulties of our posi-

tion, let us fall back on this, that the captive Israel was remembered by God, and let us be sure that no circumstances of our lives are so dark or mysterious as to warrant the faintest shadow of suspicion creeping over the brightness of our confidence in this great promise. His divine remembrance of each of His servants is certain.

But do not let us forget that it was a very sinful Zion that God thus remembered. It was because the nation had transgressed that they were captives, but their very captivity was a proof that they were not forgotten. The loving divine remembrance had to smite in order to prove that it was active. Let us neither be puzzled by our sorrows nor made less confident when we think of our sins. For there is no sin that is strong enough to chill the divine love, or to erase us from the divine remembrance. 'Captive Israel! captive because sinful, I have graven *thee* on the palms of My hands.'

II. A second thought here is that the divine remembrance guides the divine action.

The palm of the hand is the seat of strength, the instrument of work; and so, if Zion's name is written there, that means not only remembrance, but remembrance which is at the helm, as it were, which is moulding and directing all the work that is done by the hand that bears the name inscribed upon it. The thought is identical with the one which is suggested by part of the High Priest's official dress, although there the thought has a different application. He bore the names of the twelve tribes graven upon his shoulder, the seat of power, and upon his breastplate that lay above the heart, the home of love. God holds out the mighty Hand which works all things,

and says to His children: 'Look, you are graven there' —at the very fountain-head, as it were, of the divine activity. Which, being turned into plain English, is just this, that for His Church as a whole, He does move amidst the affairs of nations. You remember the grand words of one of the Psalms,—'He reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.' It is no fanatical reading of the history of earthly politics and kingdoms, if we recognise that one of the most prominent reasons for the divine activities in moulding the kingdoms, setting up and casting down, is the advancement of the kingdom of heaven and the building of the City of God. 'I have graven thee on the palms of My hands' —and when the hands go to work, it is for the Zion whose likeness they bear.

But the same truth applies to us individually. 'All things work together'; they would not do so, unless there was one dominant Will which turned the chaos into a cosmos. 'All things work,' that is very plain. The tremendous activities round us both in Nature and in history are clear to us all. But if all things and events are co-operant, working into each other, and for one end, like the wheels of a well-constructed engine, then there must be an Engineer, and they work together because He is directing them. Thus, because my name is graven on the palms of the mighty Hand that doeth all things, therefore 'all things work together for my good.' If we could but carry that quiet conviction into all the mysteries, as they sometimes seem to be, of our daily lives, and interpret everything in the light of that great thought, how different all our days would be! How far above the

petty anxieties and cares and troubles that gnaw away so much of our strength and joy; how serene, peaceful, lofty, submissive, would be our lives, and how in the darkest darkness there would be a great light, not only of hope for a distant future, but of confident assurance for the present. 'I have graven thee on the palms of My hands'—do Thou, then, as Thou wilt with me.

III. A last thought here is that the divine remembrance works all things, to realise a great ideal end, as yet unreached.

'Thy walls are continually before Me.' When this prophecy was uttered the Israelites were in captivity, and the city was a wilderness, 'the holy and beautiful House'—as this very book says—'where the fathers praised Thee was burned with fire,' the walls were broken down, rubbish and solitude were there. Yet on the palms of God's hands were inscribed the walls which were nowhere else! They were 'before Him,' though Jerusalem was a ruin. What does that mean? It means that that divine remembrance sees 'things that are not, as though they were.' In the midst of the imperfect reality of the present condition of the Church as a whole, and of us, its actual components, it sees the ideal, the perfect vision of the perfect future, and 'all the wonder that shall be.' Zion may be desolate, but 'before Him' stands what will one day stand on the earth before all men, 'the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven,' having walls great and high, and its foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones. 'Thy walls are before Me,' though the ruins are there before men.

So, brethren, the most radiant optimism is the only fitting attitude for Christian people in looking into the

future, either of the Church as a whole, or of themselves as individual members of it. God's hand is working for Zion and for me. It is guided by love that does not lose the individual in the mass, nor ever forgets any of its children, and it works towards the attainment of unattained perfection. 'This Man' does not 'begin to build and' prove 'not able to finish.'

So let us be sure that, if only we keep ourselves in the love, and continue in the grace of God, He will not slack nor stay His hand on which Zion is graven, until it has 'perfected that which concerneth us,' and fulfilled to each of us that 'which He has spoken to us of.'

I said at the beginning of these remarks that God did what He bids us do. God bids us do what He does. His name should be on our hands; that is to say, memory of Him, love of Him, regard to Him, confidence in Him should mould and guide all our activity, and the aim that we shall be builded up for a habitation of God through the Spirit should be the conscious aim of our lives, as it is the aim which He has in view in all His dealings with us. Our names on His hand; His name on our hands; so shall we be blessed.

THE SERVANT'S WORDS TO THE WEARY

'The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary; he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught.'—ISAIAH l. 4.

IN chapter xlix. 1–6, the beginning of the continuous section of which these verses are part, a transition is made from Israel as collectively the ideal servant of the Lord, to a personal Servant, whose office it is 'to bring Jacob again to Him.' We see the ideal in the very act of passing to its highest form, and that in

which it is finally fulfilled in history, namely, by the person Jesus. That Jesus was 'Thy Holy Servant' was the earliest gospel preached by Peter and John before people and rulers. It is not the most vital conception of our Lord's nature and work. The prophet does not here pierce to the core, as in his fifty-third chapter with its vision of the Suffering Servant, but this is prelude to that, and the office assigned here to the Servant cannot be fully discharged without that ascribed to Him there, as the prophet begins to discern almost immediately. The text gives us a striking view of the purpose of Messiah's mission and of His training and preparation for it.

I. The purpose of Christ's mission.

There is a remarkable contrast between the stately prelude to the section of the prophecy in chapter xlix., and the ideal in this text. There the Servant calls the isles and the distant peoples to listen, and declares that His mouth is 'like a sharp sword'; here all that is keen and smiting in His word has softened into gentle whispers of comfort to sustain the weary.

A mission addressed to 'the weary' is addressed to every man, for who is not 'weighed upon with sore distress,' or loaded with the burden and the weight of tasks beyond his power or distasteful to his inclinations, or monotonous to nausea, or prolonged to exhaustion, or toiled at with little hope and less interest? Who is not weary of himself and of his load? What but universal weariness does the universal secret desire for rest betray? We are all 'pilgrims weary of time,' and some of us are weary of even prosperity, and some of us are worn out with work, and some of us buffeted to all but exhaustion by sorrow, and all of

us long for rest, though many of us do not know where to look for it.

Jesus may have had this word in mind, when He called to Him all them 'that labour and are heavy laden.' At all events, the prophet's ideal and the evangelists' story accurately correspond. Christ's words have other characteristics, but are eminently words that sustain the weary and comfort the down-hearted. Who can ever calculate the new strength poured by them into fainting hearts and languid hands, the all but dead hopes that they have reanimated, the sorrows they have comforted, the wounds they have stanched?

What a lesson here as to the noblest use of high endowments! What a contrast to the use that so many of those to whom God has given 'the tongue of them that are taught' make of their great gifts! Literature yields but few examples of great writers who have faithfully employed their powers for that purpose, which seems so humble and is so lofty, the help of the weary, the comfort of the sad. Many pages in famous books would be cancelled if all that had been written without consideration for these classes were obliterated, as it will be one day.

But Christ not only speaks by outward words, but has other ways of lodging sustenance and comfort in souls than by vocables audible to the ear or visible to the eye on the page. 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.' He spoke by His deeds on earth, and in one and the same set of facts, He 'began to do and to teach,' the doing being named first. He 'now speaketh from Heaven' by many an inward whisper, by the communication of His own Spirit, on Whom this very office of ministering sus-

tenance and comfort is laid, and whose very name of the Comforter means One who by his being with a man strengthens him.

II. The training and preparation of the Messiah for His mission.

The Messiah is here represented as having the tongue of 'them that are taught,' and as having it, because morning by morning He has been wakened to hear God's lessons. He is thus God's scholar—a thought of which an unreflecting orthodoxy has been shy, but which it is necessary to admit unhesitatingly and ungrudgingly, if we would not reduce the manhood of Jesus to a mere phantasm. He Himself has said, 'As the Father taught Me, I speak these things.' With emphatic repetition, He was continually making that assertion, as, for instance, 'I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak . . . the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto Me, so I speak.'

The Gospels tell us of the prayers of Jesus, and of rare occasions in which a voice from heaven spoke to Him. But while these are palpable instances of His communion with God, and precious tokens of His true brotherhood with us in the indispensable characteristics of the life of faith, they are but the salient points on which the light falls, and behind them, all unknown by us, stretches an unbroken chain of like acts of fellowship. In that subordination as of a scholar to teacher, both His divine and His human nature concurred, the former in filial submission, the latter in continual, truly human derivation and reception. The man Jesus was taught and, like the boy Jesus, 'increased in wisdom.'

But while He learned as truly as we learn from God, and exercised the same communion with the Father, the same submission to Him, which other men have to exercise, and called 'us brethren, saying, I will put my trust in Him,' the difference in degree between His close fellowship with God the Father, and our broken and always partial fellowship, between His completeness of reception of God's words and our imperfect comprehension, between His perfect reproduction of the words He had heard and our faint and often mistaken echo of them, is so immense as to amount to a difference in kind. His unity of will and being with the Father ensured that all His words were God's. 'Never man spake like this man.' The man who speaks to us once for all God's words must be more than man. Other men, the highest, give us fragments of that mighty voice; Jesus speaks its whole message, and nothing but its message. Of that perfect reproduction He is calmly conscious, and claims to give it, in words which are at once lowly and instinct with more than human authority: 'All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.' Who besides Him dare make such a claim? Who besides Him could make it without being met by incredulous scorn? His utterance of the Father's words was unmarred by defect on the one hand, and by additions on the other. It was like pure water which tastes of no soil. His soul was like an open vessel plunged in a stream, filled by the flow and giving forth again its whole contents.

That divine communication to Jesus was no mere impartation of abstractions or 'truths,' still less of the poor words of man's speech, but was the flowing into His spirit of the living Father by whom He lived. And it

was unbroken. 'Morning by morning' it was going on. The line was continuous, whereas for the rest of us, at the best, it is a series of points more or less contiguous, but with dark spaces between. 'God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.'

So, then, let us hold fast by Him, the Son in whom God has spoken to us, and to all voices without and within that would woo us to listen, let us answer with the only wise answer: 'To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

THE SERVANT'S OBEDIENCE

'I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.'—ISAIAH l. 5.

I. THE secret of Christ's life, filial obedience.

The fact is attested by Scripture. By His own words: 'My meat is to do the will of My Father'; 'For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness'; 'I came down from heaven not to do My own will.' By His servant's words: 'Obedient unto death'; 'Made under the law'; 'He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.' It is involved in the belief of His righteous manhood. It is essential to true manhood. The highest ideal for humanity is conscious dependence on God, and the very definition of righteousness is conscious conformity to the Will of God. If Christ had done the noblest acts and yet had not always had this sense of being a servant, He would not have been pure and holy.

It is not inconsistent with His true Divinity. We stand afar off, but we can see this much.

The completeness of that obedience. It was continuous and it was entire.

The living heart of it: 'I delight to do Thy Will.' The Father's Will was not a force without, but Christ's whole being was conformed to it, and it was shrined within His heart and had become His choice and delight.

The expressions of His obedience were His perfect fulfilment of the divine commands, and His perfect endurance of the divine appointments.

Thus God's Will was the keynote, to which Christ's will struck the full chord.

II. The yet deeper mysteries which that perfect obedience discloses.

1. A sinless human life must be more than human. The contrast with all which we have known — the impossibility of retaining belief in the perfect obedience of Jesus unless we have underlying it the belief in His divinity. 'There is none good but one, that is God.'

2. The sinless human life suffers not for itself but for us. The combination of holiness and sorrow leads on to the mystery of atonement. The sinlessness is indispensable to the doctrine of His sacrificial death.

III. The glorious gifts which flow from that perfect obedience.

1. It gives us a living law to obey.

2. It gives us a transforming power to receive.

3. It gives us a perfect righteousness to trust to

This perfect obedience may be ours. Being ours, our lives will be strong, free, peaceful.

That obedience becomes ours by faith, which leads to love, and love to the glad obedience of sons.

THE SERVANT'S VOLUNTARY SUFFERINGS

'I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting.'—ISAIAH l. 6.

SUCH words are not to be dealt with coldly. Unless they be grasped by the heart they are not grasped at all. We do not think of analysing in the presence of a great sorrow. There can be no greater dishonour to the name of Christ than an unemotional consideration of His sufferings for us. The hindrances to a due consideration of these are manifold; some arising from intellectual, and some from moral, causes. Most men have difficulty in vivifying any historical event so as to feel its reality. There is no nobler use of the historical imagination than to direct it to that great life and death on which the salvation of the world depends.

The prophet here has advanced from the first general conception of the Servant of the Lord as recipient of divine commission, and submissive to the divine voice, to thoughts of the sufferings which He would meet with on His path, and of how He bore them.

I. The sufferings of the Servant.

The minute particularity is very noteworthy, scourging, plucking the beard, shame, all sorts of taunts and buffets on the face, and the last indignity of spitting. Clearly, then, He is not only to suffer persecution, but is to be treated with insult and to endure that strange blending, so often seen, of grim infernal laughter with grim infernal fury, the hyena's laugh and its ferocity. Wherever it occurs, it implies not only fell hate and cruelty, but also contempt and a horrible delight in triumphing over an enemy. It is found in all corrupt periods, and especially in religious

persecutions. Here it implies the rejection of the Servant.

The prophecy was literally fulfilled, but not in all its traits. This may give a hint as to the general interpretation of prophecy and may teach that external fulfilment only points to a deeper correspondence. The most salient instance is in Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem riding on an ass, which was but a finger-post to guide men's thoughts to His fulfilling the ideal of the Messianic King. And yet, the minute correspondences are worth noticing. What a strange, solemn glimpse they give into that awful divine omniscience, and into the mystery of the play of the vilest passions as being yet under control in their extremest rage!

We must note the remarkable prominence in the narratives of the Passion, of signs of contempt and mockery; Judas' kiss, the purple robe, the crown of thorns, 'wagging their heads,' 'let be, let Elias come,' etc.

Think of the exquisite pain of this to Christ. That He was sinless and full of love made it all the worse to bear. Not the physical pain, but the consciousness that He was encompassed by such an atmosphere of evil, was the sharpest pang. We should think with reverent sympathy of His perfect discernment of the sinful malignant hearts from which the sufferings came, of His pained and rejected love thrown back on itself, of His clear sight of what their heartless infliction of tortures would end in for the inflicters, of His true human feeling which shrank from being the object of contempt and execration.

II. His patient submission.

'I gave,'—purely voluntary. That word originally

expressed the patient submission with which He endured at the moment, when the lash scored His back, but it may be widened out to express Christ's perfect voluntariness in all His passion. At any moment He could have abandoned His work if His filial obedience and His love to men had let Him do so. His would-be captors fell to the ground before one momentary flash of His majesty, and they could have laid no hand on Him, if His will had not consented to His capture. Fra Angelico has grasped the thought which the prophet here uttered, and which the evangelists emphasise, that all His suffering was voluntary, and that His love to us restrained His power, and led Him to the slaughter, silent as a sheep before her shearers. For he has pourtrayed the majestic figure seated in passive endurance, with eyes blindfolded but yet wide open behind the bandage, all-seeing, wistful, sad, and patient, while around are fragments of rods, and smiting hands, and a cruel face blowing spittle on the unshrinking cheeks. He seems to be saying: 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence.' 'Thou couldest have no power at all against Me unless it were given thee.'

III. His submission to suffering in obedience to the Father's Will.

The context connects His opened ear and His not being rebellious with His giving His back to the smiters. That involves the idea that these indignities and insults were part of the divine counsel in reference to Him. That same combination of ideas is strongly presented in the early addresses of Peter, recorded in the first chapters of Acts, of which this is a specimen: 'Him, being delivered by the determinate

counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye with wicked hands have crucified and slain.' The full significance of Christ's passion as that of the atoning sacrifice was not yet clear to the apostle, any more than the Servant's sufferings were to the prophet, but both prophet and apostle were carried on by fuller experience and reflection on what they already saw clearly, to discern the inwardness and depth of these. The one soon came to see that 'by His stripes we are healed,' and the other finally wrote: 'Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' And whoever deeply ponders the startling fact that 'it pleased the Lord to bruise Him,' sinless and ever obedient as He was, will be borne, sooner or later, into the full sunlight of the blessed belief that when Jesus suffered and died, 'He died for all.' His sufferings were those of a martyr for truth, who is willing to die rather than cease to witness for it; but they were more. They were the sufferings of a lover of mankind who will face the extremest wrong that can be inflicted, rather than abandon His mission; but they were more. They were not merely the penalty which He had to pay for faithfulness to His work; they were themselves the crown and climax of His work. The Son of Man came, indeed, 'not to be ministered to but to minister,' but that, taken alone, is but a maimed view of what He came for, and we must whole-heartedly go on to say as He said, 'and to give His life a ransom for many,' if we would know the whole truth as to the sufferings of Jesus.

Again, since Christ suffers according to the will of God, it is clear that all representations of the scope of His atoning death, which represent it as moving the will of the Father to love and pardon, are travesties

of the truth and turn cause into effect. God does not love, because Jesus died, but Jesus died because God loved.

Further, it is to be noted that His sufferings are the great means by which He sustains the weary. The word to which His ears were opened, morning by morning, was the word to which He was docile when He gave His back to the smiters. It is His passion, regarded as the sacrifice for a world's sin, from which flow the most powerful stimulants to service and tonics for weary souls, the tenderest comfortings for sorrow. He sustains and comforts by the example of His life, but far more, and more sweetly, more mightily, by that which flows to us through His death. His sufferings are powerful to sustain, when thought of as our example, but they are a tenfold stronger source of patience and strength, when laid on our hearts as the price of our redemption. The Cross is, in all senses of the expression, the tree of life.

Wonder, reverence, love, gratitude, should well forth from our hearts, when we think of these cruel sufferings, but the deepest fountains in them will not be unsealed, unless we see in the suffering Servant the atoning Son.

THE SERVANT'S INFLEXIBLE RESOLVE

'For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint.'—ISAIAH l. 7.

WHAT a striking contrast between the tone of these words and of the preceding! There all is gentleness, docility, still communion, submission, patient endurance. Here all is energy and determination, resistance and martial vigour. It is like the contrast between a priest and a warrior. And that gentleness is the parent of this boldness. The same Will which is all

submission to God is all resistance in the face of hostile men. The utmost lowliness and the most resolved resistance to opposing forces are found in that prophetic image of the Servant of the Lord—even as they are found in the highest degree and most perfectly in Jesus Christ.

The sequence in this context is worth noting. We had first Christ's communion with God and communications from the Father; then the perfect submission of His Will; then that submission expressed in His voluntary sufferings; and now we have His immovable steadfastness of resistance to the temptation, which lay in these sufferings, to depart from His attitude of submission, and to abandon His work.

The former verse led us up to the verge of the great mystery of His sacrificial death. This gives us a glimpse into the depths of His human life, and shows Him to us as our example in all holy heroism.

I. The need which Christ felt to exercise firm resistance.

The words of the text are found almost reproduced in Jeremiah i. and Ezekiel iii. All prophets and servants of God have had thus to resist, and it would be superfluous to show how resistance to opposing influences is the condition of all noble life and of all true service.

But was it so with Him? The more accurate translation of the second clause of our text is to be noticed: 'Therefore I will not suffer Myself to be overcome by the shame.'

Then the shame had in it some tendency to divert Him from His course. Christ's humanity felt natural human shrinking from pain and suffering. It shrank from the contempt and mockery of those around Him,

and did so with especial sensitiveness because of His pure and sinless nature, His yearning sympathy, the atmosphere of love in which He dwelt, His clear sight of the sin, and His prevision of the consequent sorrow. If so, His sufferings did appeal to His human nature and constituted a temptation.

At the beginning the Tempter addressed himself to natural desires to procure physical gratification (bread), and to the equally natural desire to avoid suffering and pain, and to secure His kingdom by an easier method ('All these will I give Thee, if——').

And the latter temptation attended Him all through His life, and was most insistent at its close. The shadow of the cross stretched along His path from its beginning. But it is to be remembered that he had not the same need of *self*-control which we have, in that His Will was not reluctant, and that no rebellious desires had escaped from its control and needed to be reduced to submission. 'I was not rebellious.' 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' was true in the fullest extent only of Him. So the context gives us His perfect submission of will, and yet the need to harden His face toward externals from which, instinctively and without breach of filial obedience, His sensitive nature recoiled. The reality of the temptation, the limits of its reach, His consciousness of it, and His immovable obedience and resistance, are all expressed in the deep and wonderful words, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'

II. The perfect inflexible resolve.

'Face like a flint' seems to be quoted in Luke ix. 51; 'Steadily set His face.' The whole story of the Gospels gives the one impression of a life steadfast in its great

resolve. There are no traces of His ever faltering in His purpose, none of His ever suffering Himself to be diverted from it, no parentheses and no digressions. There are no blunders either. But what a contrast in this respect to all other lives! Mark's Gospel, which is eminently the gospel of the Servant, is full of energy and of this inflexible resolve, which speak in such sayings as 'I must be about My Father's business'; 'I must work the works of My Father while it is day.' That last journey, during which He 'steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,' is but a type of the whole. Christ's life was a continuous or rather a continually repeated effort.

This inflexible resolve is associated in Him with characteristics not usually allied with it. The gentleness of Christ is so obvious in His character that little needs to be said to point it out. To the influence of His character more than to any other cause may be traced the change in the perspective, so to speak, of Virtue, which characterises modern notions of perfection as contrasted with antique ones. Contrast the Greek and Roman type with the mediæval ascetic, or with the philanthropic type of modern times. Carlyle's ideal is retrograde and an anachronism. Women and patient sufferers find example in Him. But we have in Jesus Christ, too, the highest example of all the stronger and robuster virtues, the more distinctly heroic, masculine; and that not merely passive firmness of endurance such as an American Indian will show in torments, but active firmness which presses on to its goal, and, immovably resolute, will not be diverted by anything. In Him we see a resolved Will and a gentle loving Heart in perfect accord. That is a wonderful combination. We often find that such

firmness is developed at the expense of indifference to other people. It is like a war chariot, or artillery train, that goes crashing across the field, though it be over shrieking men and broken bones, and the wheels splash in blood. Resolved firmness is often accompanied with self-absorption which makes it gloomy, and with narrow limitations. Such men gather all their powers together to secure a certain end, and do it by shutting the eyes of their mind to everything but the one object, like the painter, who blocks up his studio window to get a top light, or as a mad bull lowers his head and blindly rushes on.

There is none of all this in Christ's firmness. He was able at every moment to give His whole sympathy to all who needed it, to take in all that lay around Him, and His resolute concentration of Himself on His work made Him none the less perfect in all which goes to make up complete manhood. Not only was Christ's firmness that of a fixed Will and a most loving Heart, like one of these 'rocking stones,' whose solid mass can be set vibrating by a poising bird, but the fixed Will came from the loving Heart. The very compassion and pity of His nature led to that resolved continuance in His path of redeeming love, though suffering and mockery waited for Him at each turn.

And so He is the Joshua, the Warrior-King, as well as the Priest. That Face, ever ready to kindle into pity, to melt into tenderness, to express every shade of tender feeling, was 'set as a flint.' That Eye, ever brimming with tears, was ever fixed on one goal. That Character is the type of all strength and of all gentleness.

III. The basis of Christ's fixed resolve in filial confidence.

'The Lord God will help Me.' So Christ lived by faith.

That faith led to this heroic resistance and immovable resolution.

That confidence of divine help was based upon consciousness of obedience.

It is most blessed for us to have Him as our example of faith and of brave opposition to all the antagonistic forces around us. But we need more than an example. He will but rebuke our wavering purposes of obedience, if He is no more than our pattern. Thank God, He is more, even our Fountain of Power, from Whom we can draw life akin to, because derived from, His own. In Him we can feel strength stealing into flaccid limbs, and gain 'the wrestling thews that throw the world.' If we are 'in Christ' and on the path of duty, we too may be able to set our faces as a flint, and to say truthfully: 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I may finish my course with joy.' And yet we may withal be gentle, and keep hearts 'open as day to melting charity,' and have leisure and sympathy to spare for every sorrow of others, and a hand to help and 'sustain him that is weary.'

THE SERVANT'S TRIUMPH

'He is near that justifieth Me; who will contend with Me? let us stand together: who is Mine adversary? let him come near to Me. 9. Behold, the Lord God will help Me; who is he that shall condemn Me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.'—ISAIAH l. 8, 9.

WE have reached the final words of this prophecy, and we hear in them a tone of lofty confidence and triumph. While the former ones sounded plaintive like soft flute music, this rings out clear like the note of a trumpet summoning to battle. The Servant of the Lord seems here to be eager for the conflict, not

merely patient and enduring, not merely setting His face like a flint, but confidently challenging His adversaries, and daring them to the strife.

As for the form of the words, the image underlying the whole is that of a suit at law. It is noteworthy that since Isaiah xli. this metaphor has run through the whole prophecy. The great controversy is God *versus* Idols. God appears at the bar of men, pleads His cause, calls His witnesses (xliii. 9). 'Let them' (*i.e.* idols) 'bring forth their witnesses that they may be justified.'

Possibly the form of the words here is owing to the dominance of that idea in the context, and implies nothing more than the general notion of opposition and victory. But it is at least worth remembering that in the life of Christ we have many instances in which the prophetic images were literally fulfilled even though their meaning was mainly symbolical: as *e.g.* the riding on the ass, the birth in Bethlehem, the silence before accusers, 'a bone of Him shall not be broken,' and in this very contest, 'shame and spitting.' So here there may be included a reference to that time when the hatred of opposition reached its highest point—in the sufferings and death of our Lord. And it is at least a remarkable coincidence that that highest point was reached in formal trials before the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, for the purpose of convicting Him, and that these processes as legal procedures broke down so signally.

Keeping up the metaphor, we mark here—

I. The Messiah's lofty challenge to His accusers.

II. The Messiah's expectation of divine vindication and acquittal.

III. The Messiah's confidence of ultimate triumph.

I. Messiah's lofty challenge to His accusers.

The 'justifying' which He expects may refer either to personal character or to official functional faithfulness. I think it refers to both, and that we have here, expressed in prophetic outline, not only the fact of Christ's sinlessness, but the fact of His consciousness of sinlessness.

The words are the strongest assertion of His absolute freedom from anything that an adversary could lay hold of on which to found a charge, and not merely so, but they also dare to assert that the unerring and all-penetrating eye of the Judge of all will look into His heart, and find nothing there but the mirrored image of His own perfection. I do not need to dwell on the fact of Christ's sinlessness, that He is perfect manhood without stain, without defect. I have had occasion to touch upon that truth in a former sermon on 'I was not rebellious.' Here we have to do not so much with sinlessness as with the consciousness of sinlessness.

Now note that consciousness on Christ's part.

We have to reckon with the fact of it as expressed in His own words: 'I do always the things that please Him. Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' 'The Prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me.'

In Him there is the absence of all trace of sense of sin.

No prayer for forgiveness comes from His lips.

No penitence, no acknowledgment of even weakness is heard from Him. Even in His baptism, which for others was an acknowledgment of impurity, He puts His submission to the rite, not on the ground of needing to be washed from sin, but of 'fulfilling all righteousness.'

Now, unless Christ was sinless, what do we say of

these assertions? 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us'—are we to apply that canon to Him when He stands before us and asks, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' Surely it augurs small self-knowledge or a low moral standard if, from the lips of a religious teacher, there never comes one word to indicate that he has felt the hold of evil on him. I make bold to say that if Christ were not sinless, the Apostle Paul stood far above Him, with his 'of whom I am chief.' What difference would there be between Him and the Pharisees who called forth His bitterest words by this very absence in them of consciousness of sin: 'If ye were blind ye would have no sin, but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth.'

Singularly enough the world has accepted Him at His own estimate, and has felt that these lofty assertions of absolute perfection were borne out by His life, and were consistent with the utmost lowliness of heart.

As to the adversary's failure, I need only recall the close of His life, which is representative of the whole impression made on the world by Him. What a wonderful and singular concurrence of testimonies was borne to His pure and blameless life! After months of hatred and watching, even the rulers' lynx-eyed jealousy found nothing, and they had to fall back upon false witnesses. 'Hearest thou not how many things they witness against Thee?' He stood with unmoved silence, and the lies fell down dead at His feet. Had He answered, they would have been preserved and owed their immortality to the Gospels: He held His peace and they vanished. All attempts failed so signally that at the last they were fain, in well-simu-

lated holy abhorrence, to base His condemnation on what He had said in their presence. 'How think ye, ye have heard the blasphemy?' So all that the adversary, raking through a life, could find, was that one word. That was His sin; in all else He was pure. Remember Pilate's acquittal: 'I find no fault in Him,' and his wife's warning, 'Have thou nothing to do with that just Person.' Think of Judas, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' Listen to the penitent thief's low voice gasping out in his pangs and almost collapse: 'This man hath done nothing amiss.' Listen to the Centurion telling the impression made even on his rough nature: 'Truly this was a righteous Man.'

These are the answers to the Servant's challenge, wrung from the lips of His adversaries; and they but represent the universal judgment of humanity.

There is one Man whose life has been without stain or spot, whose soul has never been crossed by a breath of passion, nor dimmed by a speck of sin, whose will has ever been filled with happy obedience, whose conscience has been undulled by evil and untaught to speak in condemnation, whose whole nature has been like some fair marble, pure in hue, perfect in form, and unstained to the very core. There is one Man who can front the most hostile scrutiny with the bold challenge, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' and His very haters have to answer, 'I find no fault in Him,' while those that love Him rejoice to proclaim Him 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' There is one Man who can front the most rigid Law of Duty and say, 'I came not to destroy but to fulfil,' and the stony tables seem to glow with tender light, as of rocky cliffs in morning sunshine, attesting

that He has indeed fulfilled all righteousness. There is one Man who can stand before God without repentance or confession, and whose claim 'I do always the things that please Him,' the awful voice from the opening heavens endorses, when it proclaims: 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' The lowly Servant of God flings out His challenge to the universe: 'Who will contend with Me?' and that gage has lain in the lists for nineteen centuries unlifted.

II. The Messiah's expectation of divine vindication and acquittal.

Like many another man, Christ had to strengthen Himself against calumny and slander by turning to God, and finding comfort in the belief that there was One who would do Him right, and as throughout this context we have had the true humanity of our Lord in great prominence, it is worth while to dwell for a moment on that thought of His real sharing in the pain of misconstruction and groundless charges, and of His too having to say, as we have so often to say, 'Well, there is one who knows. Men may condemn but God will acquit.'

But there is something more than that here. The divine vindication and acquittal is not a mere hidden thought and judgment in the mind of God. It is a declaring and showing to be innocent, and that not by word but by deed. That expectation seemed to be annihilated and made ludicrous by His death. But the 'justifying' of which our text speaks takes place in Christ's resurrection and ascension.

'Manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit' (1 Timothy iii. 16). 'Declared to be the Son of God with power, . . . by the resurrection from the dead' (Rom. i. 4).

His death seems the entire abandonment of this holy and sinless man. It seems to demonstrate His claims to be madness, His hope to be futile, His promises to be wind. No wonder that the sorrowing apostles wailed, 'We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.' The death of Christ, if it were but a martyr's death, and if we had to believe that that frame had crumbled into dust, and that heart ceased for ever to beat, would not only destroy the worth of all that He spoke, but would be the saddest instance in all history of the irreversible sway that death wields over all mankind, and would deepen the darkness and sadden the gloom of the grave. True, there were not wanting even in His dying hours mysterious indications, such as His promise to the penitent thief. But these only make the disappointment the deeper, if there was nothing more after His death.

So Christ's justification is in His resurrection and ascension.

III. The Messiah's confidence of ultimate triumph.

In the last words of the text the adversaries are massed together. The confidence that the Lord God will help and justify leads to the conviction that all opposition to Him is futile and leads to destruction.

We see the historical fulfilment in the fate of the nation. 'His blood be upon us and upon our children.'

We have a truth applying universally that antagonism to Him is self-destructive.

Two forms of destruction are here named. There is a slow decay going on in the opponents and their opposition, as a garment waxing old, and there is a being fretted away by the imperceptible working of external causes, as by gnawing moths.

Applied to persons.

To opposing systems.

How many antagonists the Gospel has had, and one after another has been antiquated, and their books are only known because fragments of them are preserved in Christian writings. Paganism is gone from Europe, and its idols are in our museums. Each generation has its own phase of opposition, which lasts for a little while. The mists round the sun melt, the clouds piled in the north, surging up to bury it beneath their banks, are dissipated. The sea roars and smashes on the cliffs, but it ebbs and calms. Some of us have seen more than one school of thought which came to the assault of Christianity, with colours flying and drums rattling, defeated utterly and forgotten, and so it will always be. One may be sure that each enemy in turn will descend to the oblivion that has already received so many, and can imagine these beaten foes rising from their seats to welcome the newcomer with the sad greeting: 'Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?'

We are 'justified' in His 'justification.'

The real connection between us and Christ by faith, makes our justification to be involved in His, so that it is no mere accommodation but a profound perception of the real relation between Christ and us, when Paul, in Romans viii. 34, triumphantly claims the words of our text for Christ's disciples, and rings out their challenge on behalf of all believers: 'It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?'

Do you trust in Christ? Then you too can dare to say: 'The Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?'

A CALL TO FAITH

'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.'—ISAIAH l. 10.

THE persons addressed in this call to faith are 'those who fear the Lord,' and 'obey the voice of His Servant.' In that collocation is implied that these two things are necessarily connected, so that obedience to Christ is the test of true religion, and the fear of the Lord does not exist where the word of the Son is neglected or rejected.

But besides that most fruitful and instructive juxtaposition, other important thoughts come into view here. The fact that the call to faith is addressed to those who are regarded as already fearing God suggests the need for renewed and constantly repeated acts of confidence, at every stage of the Christian life, and opens up the whole subject of the growth and progress of individual religion, as secured by the continuous exercise of faith. The call is addressed to all at every stage of advancement. Of course it is addressed also to those who are disobedient and rebellious. But that wider aspect of the merciful invitation does not come into view here.

But there is another clause in the description of the persons addressed, 'Who walketh in darkness and hath no light.' This is, no doubt, primarily a reference to the great sorrow that filled, like a gloomy thundercloud, the horizon of Jewish prophets, small and uninteresting as it seems to us, namely, the captivity of Israel and their expulsion from their land. The faithful remnant are not to escape their share in the national calamity. But while it lasts, they are to wait patiently

on the Lord, and not to cast away their confidence, though all seems dark and dreary.

The exhortation thus regarded suggests the power and duty of faith even in times of disaster and sorrow. But another meaning has often been attached to these words, they have been lifted into another region, the spiritual, and have been supposed to refer to a state of feeling not unknown to devout hearts, in which the religious life is devoid of joy and peace. That is a phase of Christian experience, which meets any one who knows much of the workings of men's hearts, and of his own, when faith is exercised with but little of the light of faith, and the fear of the Lord is cherished with but scant joy in the Lord. Now if it be remembered that such an application of the words is not their original purpose, there can be no harm in using them so. Indeed we may say that, as the words are perfectly general, they include a reference to all darkness of life or soul, however produced, whether it come from the night of sorrow falling on us from without, or from mists and gloom rising like heavy vapours from our own hearts. So considered, the text suggests the one remedy for all gloom and weakness in the spiritual life.

Thus, then, we have three different sets of circumstances in which faith is enforced as the source of true strength and our all-embracing duty. In outward sorrow and trial, trust; in inward darkness and sadness, trust; in every stage of Christian progress, trust. Or

I. Faith the light in the darkness of the world.

II. Faith the light in the darkness of the soul.

III. Faith the light in every stage of Christian progress.

I. Faith our light in the darkness of the world.

The mystery and standing problem of the Old Testament is the coexistence of goodness and sorrow, and the mystery still remains, and ever will remain, a fact. It is partially alleviated if we remember that one main purpose of all our sorrows is to lead us to this confidence.

1. The call to faith is the true voice of all our sorrows.

It seems easy to trust when all is bright, but really it is just as hard, only we can more easily deceive ourselves, when physical well-being makes us comfortable. We are less conscious of our own emptiness, we mask our poverty from ourselves, we do not seem to need God so much. But sorrow reveals our need to us. Other props are struck away, and it is either collapse or Him. We learn the vanity, the transiency, of all besides.

Sorrow reveals God, as the pillar of cloud glowed brighter when the evening fell. Sorrow is meant to awaken the powers that are apt to sleep in prosperity.

So the true voice of all our griefs is 'Come up hither.' They call us to trust, as nightfall calls us to light up our lamps. The snow keeps the hidden seeds warm; shepherds burn heather on the hillside that young grass may spring.

2. The call to faith echoes from the voice of the Servant.

Jesus in His darkness rested on God, and in all His sorrows was yet anointed with the oil of gladness. In every pang He has been before us. The rack is sanctified because He has been stretched upon it.

3. The substance of the call.

It is to *trust*, not to anything more. No attempts to

stifle tears are required. There is no sin in sorrow. The emotions which we feel to God in bright days are not appropriate at such times. There are seasons in every life when all that we can say is, 'Truly this is a grief, and I will bear it.'

What then *is* required? Assurance of God's loving will sending sorrow. Assurance of God's strengthening presence in it, assurance of deliverance from it. These, not more, are required; these are the elements of the faith here called for.

Such faith may co-exist with the keenest sense of loss. The true attitude in sorrow may be gathered from Christ's at the grave of Lazarus, contrasted with the excessive mourning of the sisters, and the feigned grief of the Jews.

There are times when the most that we can do is to trust even in the great darkness, 'Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him.' Submissive silence is sometimes the most eloquent confession of faith. 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.'

4. The blessed results of such faith.

It is implied that we may find all that we need, and more, in God. Have we to mourn friends? 'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne.' Have we lost wealth? We have in Him a treasure that moth or rust cannot touch. Are our hopes blasted? 'Happy is He . . . whose hope is in the Lord his God.' Is our health broken? 'I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance.' 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than these.'

How can we face the troubles of life without Him? God calls us when in darkness, and by the darkness, to trust in His name and stay ourselves on Him. Happy

are we if we answer 'Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines . . . yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.'

II. Faith, our light in the darkness of the soul.

No doubt there may be such a thing as true fear of God in the soul along with spiritual darkness, faith without the joy of faith. Now this condition seems contradictory of the very nature of the Christian life. For religion is union with God who is light, and if we walk in Him, we are in the light. How then can such experience be?

We must dismiss the notion of God's desertion of the trusting soul. He is always the same; He has 'never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain.' But while putting aside that false explanation, we can see how such darkness may be. If our religious life was in more vigorous exercise, more pure, perfect and continuous, there would be no separation of faith and the joy of faith. But we have not such unruffled, perfect, uninterrupted faith, and hence there may be, and often is, faith without much joy of faith. I would not say that such experience is always the fruit of sin. But certainly we are not to blame Him or to think of Him as breaking His promises, or departing from His nature. No principles, be they ever so firmly held, ever so undoubtingly received, ever so passionately embraced, exert their whole power equally at all moments in a life. There come times of languor when they seem to be mere words, dead commonplaces, as unlike their former selves as sapless winter boughs to their summer pride of leafy beauty. The same variation in our realising grasp affects the truths of the Gospel. Sometimes they seem but words, with all the life and power

sucked out of them, pale shadows of themselves, or like the dried bed of a wady with blazing, white stones, where flashing water used to leap, and all the flowerets withered, which once bent their meek little heads to drink. No facts are always equally capable of exciting their correspondent emotions. Those which most closely affect our personal life, in which we find our deepest joys, are not always present in our minds, and when they are, do not always touch the springs of our feelings. No possessions are always equally precious to us. The rich man is not always conscious with equal satisfaction of his wealth. If, then, the way from the mind to the emotions is not always equally open, *there* is a reason why there may be faith without light of joy. If the thoughts are not always equally concentrated on the things which produce joy, *there* is a reason why there may be the habit of fearing God, though there be not the present vigorous exercise of faith, and consequently but little light.

Another reason may lie in the disturbing and saddening influence of earthly cares and sorrows. There are all weathers in a year. And the highest hope and nearest possible approach to joy is sometimes 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.' Our lives are sometimes like an Arctic winter in which for many days is no sun.

Another reason may be found in the very fact that we are apt to look impatiently for peace and joy, and to be more exercised with these than with that which produces them.

Another may be errors or mistakes about God and His Gospel.

Another may be absorption with our own sin instead

of with Him. To all these add temperament, education, habit, example, influence of body on the mind, and of course also positive inconsistencies and a low tone of Christian life.

It is clear then that, if these be the causes of this state, the one cure for it is to exercise our faith more energetically.

Trust, do not look back. We are tempted to cast away our confidence and to say: What profit shall I have if I pray unto Him? But it is on looking onwards, not backwards, that safety lies.

Trust, do not think about your sins.

Trust, do not think so much about your joy.

It is in the occupation of heart and mind with Jesus that joy and peace come. To make them our direct aim is the way not to attain them. Though now there seems a long wintry interval between seed time and harvest, yet 'in due season we shall reap if we faint not.'

'In the fourth watch of the night Jesus came unto them.'

III. Faith our guiding light in every stage of Christian progress.

Those who already 'fear God' are in the text exhorted to trust.

In the most advanced Christian life there are temptations to abandon our confidence. We never on earth come to such a point as that, without effort, we are sure to continue in the way. True, habit is a wonderful ally of goodness, and it is a great thing to have it on our side, but all our lives long, there will be hindrances without and within which need effort and self-repression. On earth there is no time when it is safe for us to go unarmed. The force of gravitation

acts however high we climb. Not till heaven is reached will 'love' be 'its own security,' and nature coincide with grace. And even in heaven faith 'abideth,' but there it will be without effort.

1. The most advanced Christian life needs a perpetual renewal and repetition of past acts of faith.

It cannot live on a past any more than the body can subsist on last year's food. The past is like the deep portions of coral reefs, a mere platform for the living present which shines on the surface of the sea, and grows. We must gather manna daily.

The life is continued by the same means as that by which it was begun. There is no new duty or method for the most advanced Christian; he has to do just what he has been doing for half a century. We cannot transcend the creatural position, we are ever dependent. 'To hoar hairs will I carry you.' The initial point is prolonged into a continuous line.

2. The most advanced and mature faith is capable of increase, in regard to its knowledge of its object, and in intensity, constancy, power. At first it may be a tremulous trust, afterwards it should become an assured confidence. At first it may be but a dim recognition, as in a glass darkly, of the great love which has redeemed us at a great price; afterwards it should become the clear vision of the trusted Friend and lifelong companion of our souls, who is all in all to us. At first it may be an interrupted hold, afterwards it should become such a grasp as the roots of a tree have on the soil. At first it may be a feeble power ruling over our rebel selves, like some king beleaguered in his capital, who has no sway beyond its walls, afterwards it should become a peaceful sovereign who guides and sways all the

powers of the soul and outgoings of the life. At first it may be like a premature rose putting forth pale petals on an almost leafless bough, afterwards the whole tree should be blossomed over with fragrant flowers, the homes of light and sweetness. The highest faith may be heightened, and the spirits before the throne pray the prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith.'

For us all, then, the merciful voice of the servant of the Lord calls to His light. Our faith is our light in darkness, only as a window is the light of a house, or the eye, of the body, because it admits and discerns that true light. He calls us each from the darkness. Do not try to make fires for yourselves, ineffectual and transient, but look to Him, and you shall not walk in darkness, even amid the gloom of earth, but shall have light in your darkness, till the time come when, in a clearer heaven and a lighter air, 'Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.'

DYING FIRES

'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that gird yourselves about with firebrands: walk ye in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.'—ISAIAH l. 11.

THE scene brought before us in these words is that of a company of belated travellers in some desert, lighting a little fire that glimmers ineffectual in the darkness of the eerie waste. They huddle round its dying embers for a little warmth and company, and they hope it will scare wolf and jackal, but their fuel is all burned, and they have to go to sleep without its solace and security. The prophet's imaginative picture is painted from life,

and is a sad reality in the cases of all who seek to warm themselves at any fire that they kindle for themselves, apart from God.

I. A sad, true picture of human life.

It does not cover, nor is presented by the prophet as covering, all the facts of experience. Every man has his share of sunshine, but still it is true of all who are not living in dependence on and communion with God, that they are but travellers in the dark.

Scripture uses the image of darkness as symbolic of three sad facts of our experience: ignorance, sin, sorrow. Are not all these the characteristics of godless lives?

As for ignorance—a godless man has no key to the awful problems that front him. He knows not God, who is to him a dread, a name, a mystery. He knows not himself, the depths of his nature, its possibilities for good or evil, whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. He has no solution for the riddle of the universe. It is to him a chaos, and darkness is upon the face of the deep.

As to sin, the darkness of ignorance is largely due to the darkness of sin. In every heart comes sometimes the consciousness that it is thus darkened by sin. The sense of sin is with all men more or less—much perverted, often wrong in its judgments, feeble, easily silenced, but for all that it is there—and it is great part of the cold obstruction that shuts out the light. Sin weaves the pall that shrouds the world.

As for darkness of sorrow—we must beware that we do not exaggerate. God makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and there is gladness in every life, much that arises from fulfilled desires, from accomplished purposes, from gratified affections. But when all this has been freely admitted, still sadness crouches

somewhere in all hearts, and over every life the storm sometimes stoops.

We need nothing beyond our own experience and the slightest knowledge of other hearts to know how shallow and one-sided a view of life that is which sees only the joy and forgets the sorrow, which ignores the night and thinks only of the day; which, looking out on nature, is blind to the pain and agony, the horror and the death, which are as real parts of it as brightness and beauty, love and life. Every little valley that lies in lovely loneliness has its scenes of desolation, and tempest has broken over the fairest scenes. Every river has drowned its man. Over every inch of blue sky the thunder cloud has rolled. Every summer has its winter, every day its night, every life its death. All stars set, all moons wane. 'Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang' come after every leafy June.

Sorrow is as deeply embedded in the necessity and constitution of things as joy. 'God hath set one over against another, and hath made all things double.'

II. The vain attempts at light.

There is bitter irony in the prophet's description of the poor flickering spot of light in the black waste and of its swift dying out. The travellers without a watch-fire are defenceless from midnight prowlers. How full of solemn truth about godless lives the vivid outline picture is!

Men try to free themselves from the miseries of ignorance, sin, and sorrow.

Think of the insufficiency of all such attempts, the feeble flicker which glimmers for an hour, and then fuel fails and it goes out. Then the travellers can journey no further, but 'lie down in sorrow,' and without a

watchfire they become a prey to all the beasts of the field. It is a little picture taken from the life.

It vividly paints how men *will* try to free themselves from the miseries of their condition, how insufficient all their attempts are, how transient the relief, and how bitter and black the end.

We may apply these thoughts to—

1. Men-made grounds of hope before God.
2. Men-made attempts to read the mysteries.

We do not say this of all human learning, but of that which, apart from God's revelation, deals with the subjects of that revelation.

3. Men-made efforts at self-reformation.
4. Men-made attempts at alleviating sorrow.

Scripture abounds in other metaphors for the same solemn spiritual facts as are set before us in this picture of the dying watchfire and the sad men watching its decline. Godless lives draw from broken cisterns out of which the water runs. They build with untempered mortar. They lean on broken reeds that wound the hand pressed on them. They spend money for that which is not bread. But all these metaphors put together do not tell all the vanity, disappointments, and final failure and ruin of such a life. That last glimpse given in the text of the sorrowful sleeper stretched by the black ashes, with darkness round and hopeless heaviness within, points to an issue too awful to be dwelt on by a preacher, and too awful not to be gravely considered by each of us for himself.

III. The light from God.

What would the dead fire and the ring of ashes on the sand matter when morning dawned? Jesus is our Sun. He rises, and the spectres of the night melt into thin air, and 'joy cometh in the morning.' He floods

our ignorance with knowledge of the Father whose name He declares, with knowledge of ourselves, of the world, of our destiny and our duty, our hopes and our home. He takes away the sin of the world. He gives the oil of joy for mourning. For every human necessity He is enough. Follow Him and your life's pilgrimage shall not be a midnight one, but accomplished in sunshine. 'I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'

THE AWAKENING OF ZION

'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.'—ISAIAH li. 9.

'Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion.'—ISAIAH lii. 1.

BOTH these verses are, I think, to be regarded as spoken by one voice, that of the Servant of the Lord. His majestic figure, wrapped in a light veil of obscurity, fills the eye in all these later prophecies of Isaiah. It is sometimes clothed with divine power, sometimes girded with the towel of human weakness, sometimes appearing like the collective Israel, sometimes plainly a single person.

We have no difficulty in solving the riddle of the prophecy by the light of history. Our faith knows One who unites these diverse characteristics, being God and man, being the Saviour of the body, which is part of Himself and instinct with His life. If we may suppose that He speaks in both verses of the text, then, in the one, as priest and intercessor, He lifts the prayers of earth to heaven in His own holy hands—and in the other, as messenger and Word of God, He brings the answer and command of heaven to earth on His own authoritative lips—thus setting forth the deep mystery of His person and double office as mediator between

man and God. But even if we put aside that thought, the correspondence and relation of the two passages remain the same. In any case they are intentionally parallel in form and connected in substance. The latter is the answer to the former. The cry of Zion is responded to by the call of God. The awaking of the arm of the Lord is followed by the awaking of the Church. He puts on strength in clothing us with His might, which becomes ours.

The mere juxtaposition of these verses suggests the point of view from which I wish to treat them on this occasion. I hope that the thoughts to which they lead may help to further that quickened earnestness and expectancy of blessing, without which Christian work is a toil and a failure.

We have here a common principle underlying both the clauses of our text, to which I must first briefly ask attention, namely—

I. The occurrence in the Church's history of successive periods of energy and of languor.

It is freely admitted that such alternation is not the highest ideal of growth, either in the individual or in the community. Our Lord's own parables set forth a more excellent way—the way of uninterrupted increase, whereof the type is the springing corn, which puts forth 'first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' and passes through all the stages from the tender green spikelets that gleam over the fields in the spring-tide to the yellow abundance of autumn, in one unbroken season of genial months. So would our growth be best, healthiest, happiest. So *might* our growth be, if the mysterious life in the seed met no checks. But, as a matter of fact, the Church has

not thus grown. Rather at the best, its emblem is to be looked for, not in corn, but in the forest tree—the very rings in whose trunk tell of recurring seasons when the sap has risen at the call of spring, and sunk again before the frowns of winter. I have not to do now with the causes of this. These will fall to be considered presently. Nor am I saying that such a manner of growth is inevitable. I am only pointing out a fact, capable of easy verification and familiar to us all. Our years have had summer and winter. The evening and the morning have completed all the days since the first.

We all know it only too well. In our own hearts we have known such times, when some cold clinging mist wrapped us round and hid all the heaven of God's love and the starry lights of His truth; when the visible was the only real, and He seemed far away and shadowy; when there was neither confidence in our belief, nor heat in our love, nor enthusiasm in our service; when the shackles of conventionalism bound our souls, and the fetters of the frost imprisoned all their springs. And we have seen a like palsy smite whole regions and ages of the Church of God, so that even the sensation of impotence was dead like all the rest, and the very tradition of spiritual power had faded away. I need not point to the signal historical examples of such times in the past. Remember England a hundred years ago—but what need to travel so far? May I venture to draw my example from nearer home, and ask, have we not been living in such an epoch? I beseech you, think whether the power which the Gospel preached by us wields on ourselves, on our churches, on the world, is what Christ meant it and fitted to exercise. Why, if we hold our own in

respect to the material growth of our population, it is as much as we do. Where is the joyful buoyancy and expansive power with which the Gospel burst into the world? It looks like some stream that leaps from the hills, and at first hurries from cliff to cliff full of light and music, but flows slower and more sluggish as it advances, and at last almost stagnates in its flat marshes. Here we are with all our machinery, our culture, money, organisations—and the net result of it all at the year's end is but a poor handful of ears. 'Ye sow much and bring home little.' Well may we take up the wail of the old Psalm, 'We see not our signs. There is no more any prophet; neither is there any among us that knoweth how long—arise, O Lord, plead Thine own cause.'

If, then, there are such recurring seasons of languor, they must either go on deepening till sleep becomes death, or they must be broken by a new outburst of vigorous life. It would be better if we did not need the latter. The uninterrupted growth would be best; but if that has not been attained, then the ending of winter by spring, and the suppling of the dry branches, and the resumption of the arrested growth, is the next best, and the only alternative to rotting away.

And it is by such times that the Kingdom of Christ always has grown. Its history has been one of successive impulses gradually exhausted, as by friction and gravity, and mercifully repeated just at the moment when it was ceasing to advance and had begun to slide backwards. And in such a manner of progress, the Church's history has been in full analogy with that of all other forms of human association and activity. It is not in religion alone that there are

'revivals,' to use the word of which some people have such a dread. You see analogous phenomena in the field of literature, arts, social and political life. In them all, there come times of awakened interest in long-neglected principles. Truths which for many years had been left to burn unheeded, save by a faithful few watchers of the beacon, flame up all at once as the guiding pillars of a nation's march, and a whole people strike their tents and follow where they lead. A mysterious quickening thrills through society. A contagion of enthusiasm spreads like fire, fusing all hearts in one. The air is electric with change. Some great advance is secured at a stride; and before and after that supreme effort are years of comparative quiescence; those before being times of preparation, those after being times of fruition and exhaustion—but slow and languid compared with the joyous energy of that moment. One day may be as a thousand years in the history of a people, and a nation may be born in a day.

So also is the history of the Church. And thank God it is so, for if it had not been for the dawning of these times of refreshing, the steady operation of the Church's worldliness would have killed it long ago.

Surely, dear brethren, we ought to desire such a merciful interruption of the sad continuity of our languor and decay. The surest sign of its coming would be a widespread desire and expectation of its coming, joined with a penitent consciousness of our heavy and sinful slumber. For we believe in a God who never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them, and in whose merciful providence every desire is a prophecy of its own fruition. This attitude of quickened anticipation, diffusing itself silently through many hearts, is

like the light air that springs up before sunrise, or like the solemn hush that holds all nature listening before the voice of the Lord in the thunder.

And another sign of its approach is the extremity of the need. 'If winter come, can spring be far behind?' For He who is always with Zion strikes in with His help when the want is at its sorest. His 'right early' is often the latest moment before destruction. And though we are all apt to exaggerate the urgency of the hour and the severity of *our* conflict, it certainly does seem that, whether we regard the languor of the Church or the strength of our adversaries, succour delayed a little longer would be succour too late. 'The tumult of those that rise up against Thee increaseth continually. It is time for Thee to work.'

The juxtaposition of these passages suggests for us—

II. The twofold explanation of these variations.

That bold metaphor of God's sleeping and waking is often found in Scripture, and generally expresses the contrast between the long years of patient forbearance, during which evil things and evil men go on their rebellious road unchecked but by Love, and the dread moment when some throne of iniquity, some Babylon cemented by blood, is smitten to the dust. Such is the original application of the expression here. But the contrast may fairly be widened beyond that specific form of it, and taken to express any apparent variations in the forth-putting of His power. The prophet carefully avoids seeming to suggest that there are changes in God Himself. It is not He but His arm, that is to say, His active energy, that is invoked to awake. The captive Church prays that the dormant might which could so easily shiver her prison-house would flame forth into action.

We may, then, see here implied the cause of these alternations, of which we have been speaking, on its divine side, and then, in the corresponding verse addressed to the Church, the cause on the human side.

As to the former, it is true that God's arm sometimes slumbers, and is not clothed with power. There are, as a fact, apparent variations in the energy with which He works in the Church and in the world. And they are real variations, not merely apparent. But we have to distinguish between the power, and what Paul calls 'the might of the power.' The one is final, constant, unchangeable. It does not necessarily follow that the other is. The rate of operation, so to speak, and the amount of energy actually brought into play may vary, though the force remains the same.

It is clear from experience that there are these variations; and the only question with which we are concerned is, are they mere arbitrary jets and spurts of a divine power, sometimes gushing out in full flood, sometimes trickling in painful drops, at the unknown will of the unseen hand which controls the flow? Is the 'law of the Spirit of life' at all revealed to us; or are the reasons occult, if there be any reasons at all other than a mere will that it shall be so? Surely, whilst we never can know all the depths of His counsels and all the solemn concourse of reasons which, to speak in man's language, determine the energy of His manifested power, He has left us in no doubt that this is the weightiest part of the law which it follows—the might with which God works on the world through His Church varies according to the Church's receptiveness and faithfulness.

Our second text tells us that if God's arm seems to slumber and really does so, it is because Zion sleeps. In itself that immortal energy knows no variableness.

'He fainteth not, neither is weary.' 'The Lord's arm is not shortened that He cannot save.' 'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' But He works through us; and we have the solemn and awful power of checking the might which would flow through us; of restraining and limiting the Holy One of Israel. It avails nothing that the ocean stretches shoreless to the horizon; a jar can hold only a jarful. The receiver's capacity determines the amount received, and the receiver's desire determines his capacity. The law has ever been, 'according to your faith be it unto you.' God gives as much as we will, as much as we can hold, as much as we use, and far more than we deserve. As long as we will bring our vessels the golden oil will flow, and after the last is filled, there yet remains more that we might have had, if we could have held it, and might have held if we would. 'Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in yourselves.'

So, dear brethren, if we have to lament times of torpor and small success, let us be honest with ourselves, and recognise that all the blame lies with us. If God's arm seems to slumber, it is because we are asleep. His power is invariable, and the Gospel which is committed to our trust has lost none of its ancient power, whatsoever men may say. If there be variations, they cannot be traced to the divine element in the Church, which in itself is constant, but altogether to the human, which shifts and fluctuates, as we only too sadly know. The light in the beacon-tower is steady, and the same; but the beam it throws across the waters sometimes fades to a speck, and sometimes flames out clear and far across the heaving waves, according to the position of the glasses and shades around it. The sun pours out heat as pro-

fusely and as long at midwinter as on midsummer-day, and all the difference between the frost and darkness and glowing brightness and flowering life, is simply owing to the earth's place in its orbit and the angle at which the unalterable rays fall upon it. The changes are in the terrestrial sphere; the heavenly is fixed for ever the same.

May I not venture to point an earnest and solemn appeal with these truths? Has there not been poured over us the spirit of slumber? Does it not seem as if an opium sky had been raining soporifics on our heads? We have had but little experience of the might of God amongst us of late years, and we need not wonder at it. There is no occasion to look far for the reason. We have only to regard the low ebb to which religious life has been reduced amongst us to have it all and more than all accounted for. I fully admit that there has been plenty of activity, perhaps more than the amount of real life warrants, not a little liberality, and many virtues. But how languid and torpid the true Christian life has been! how little enthusiasm! how little depth of communion with God! how little unworldly elevation of soul! how little glow of love! An improvement in social position and circumstances, a freer blending with the national life, a full share of civic and political honours, a higher culture in our pulpits, fine chapels, and applauding congregations—are but poor substitutes for what many of us have lost in racing after them. We have the departed prophets' mantle, the outward resemblance to the fathers who have gone, but their fiery zeal has passed to heaven with them; and softer, weaker men, we stand timidly on the river's brink, invoking the Lord God of Elijah, and too often the flood that obeyed them has no ear for our feebler voice.

I speak to many who are in some sort representatives of the churches throughout the land, and they can tell whether my words are on the whole true or overstrained. We who labour in our great cities, what say we? If one of the number may speak for the rest, we have to acknowledge that commercial prosperity and business cares, the eagerness after pleasure and the exigencies of political strife, diffused doubt and widespread artistic and literary culture, are eating the very life out of thousands in our churches, and lowering their fervour till, like molten iron cooling in the air, what was once all glowing with ruddy heat is crusted over with foul black scoriæ ever encroaching on the tiny central warmth. You from rural churches, what say you? Have you not to speak of deepening torpor settling down on quiet corners, of the passing away of grey heads which leave no successors, of growing difficulties and lessened power to meet them, that make you sometimes all but despair?

I am not flinging indiscriminate censures. I know that there are lights as well as shades in the picture. I am not flinging censures at all. But I am giving voice to the confessions of many hearts, that our consciousness of our blame may be deepened, and we may hasten back to that dear Lord whom we have left to serve alone, as His first disciples left Him once to agonise alone under the gnarled olives in Gethsemane, while they lay sleeping in the moonlight. Listen to His gentle rebuke, full of pain and surprised love, 'What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?' Listen to His warning call, loving as the kiss with which a mother wakes her child, 'Arise, let us be going'—and let us shake the spirit of slumber from our limbs, and

serve Him as those unsleeping spirits do, who rest not day nor night from vision and work and praise.

III. The beginning of all awaking is the Church's earnest cry to God.

It is with us as with infants, the first sign of whose awaking is a cry. The mother's quick ear hears it through all the household noises, and the poor little troubled life that woke to a scared consciousness of loneliness and darkness, is taken up into tender arms, and comforted and calmed. So, when we dimly perceive how torpid we have been, and start to find that we have lost our Father's hand, the first instinct of that waking, which must needs be partly painful, is to call to Him, whose ear hears our feeble cry amid the sound of praise like the voice of many waters, that billows round His throne, and whose folding arms keep us 'as one whom his mother comforteth.' The beginning of all true awaking must needs be prayer.

For every such stirring of quickened religious life must needs have in it bitter penitence and pain at the discovery flashed upon us of the wretched deadness of our past—and, as we gaze like some wakened sleep-walker into the abyss where another step might have smashed us to atoms, a shuddering terror seizes us that must cry, 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.' And every such stirring of quickened life will have in it, too, desire for more of His grace, and confidence in His sure bestowal of it, which cannot but breathe itself in prayer.

Nor is Zion's cry to God only the beginning and sign of all true awaking: it is also the condition and indispensable precursor of all perfecting of recovery from spiritual languor.

I have already pointed out the relation between the waking of God and the waking of His Church, from which that necessarily follows. God's power flows into our weakness in the measure and on condition of our desires. We are sometimes told that we err in praying for the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, because ever since Pentecost His Church has had the gift. The objection alleges an unquestioned fact, but the conclusion drawn from it rests on an altogether false conception of the manner of that abiding gift. The Spirit of God, and the power which comes from Him, are not given as a purse of money might be put into a man's hand once and for all, but they are given in a continuous impartation and communication and are received and retained moment by moment, according to the energy of our desires and the faithfulness of our use. As well might we say, Why should I ask for natural life, I received it half a century ago? Yes, and at every moment of that half-century I have continued to live, not because of a past gift, but because at each moment God is breathing into my nostrils the breath of life. So is it with the life which comes from His Spirit. It is maintained by constant efflux from the fountain of Life, by constant impartation of His quickening breath. And as He must continually impart, so must we continually receive, else we perish. Therefore, brethren, the first step towards awaking, and the condition of all true revival in our own souls and in our churches, is this earnest cry, 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.'

Thank God for the outpouring of a long unwonted spirit of prayer in many places. It is like the melting of the snows in the high Alps, at once the sign of spring and the cause of filling the stony river beds with flash-

ing waters, that bring verdure and growth wherever they come. The winter has been long and hard. We have all to confess that we have been restraining prayer before God. Our work has been done with but little sense of our need of His blessing, with but little ardour of desire for His power. We have prayed lazily, scarcely believing that answers would come; we have not watched for the reply, but have been like some heartless marksman who draws his bow and does not care to look whether his arrow strikes the target. These mechanical words, these conventional petitions, these syllables winged by no real desire, inspired by no faith, these expressions of devotion, far too wide for their real contents, which rattle in them like a dried kernel in a nut, are these prayers? Is there any wonder that they have been dispersed in empty air, and that we have been put to shame before our enemies? Brethren in the ministry, do we need to be surprised at our fruitless work, when we think of our prayerless studies and of our faithless prayers? Let *us* remember that solemn word, 'The pastors have become brutish, and have not sought the Lord, therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.' And let us all, brethren, betake ourselves, with penitence and lowly consciousness of our sore need, to prayer, earnest and importunate, believing and persistent, like this heaven-piercing cry which captive Israel sent up from her weary bondage.

Look at the passionate earnestness of it—expressed in the short, sharp cry, thrice repeated, as from one in mortal need; and see to it that our drowsy prayers be like it. Look at the grand confidence with which it founds itself on the past, recounting the mighty deeds

of ancient days, and looking back, not for despair but for joyful confidence, to the generations of old; and let our faint-hearted faith be quickened by the example, to expect great things of God. The age of miracles is not gone. The mightiest manifestations of God's power in the spread of the Gospel in the past remain as patterns for His future. We have not to look back as from low-lying plains to the blue peaks on the horizon, across which the Church's path once lay, and sigh over the changed conditions of the journey. The highest water-mark that the river in flood has ever reached will be reached and overpassed again, though to-day the waters may seem to have hopelessly subsided. Greater triumphs and deliverances shall crown the future than have signalised the past. Let our faithful prayer base itself on the prophecies of history and on the unchangeableness of God.

Think, brethren, of the prayers of Christ. Even He, whose spirit needed not to be purged from stains or calmed from excitement, who was ever in His Father's house whilst He was about His Father's business, blending in one, action and contemplation, had need to pray. The moments of His life thus marked are very significant. When He began His ministry, the close of the first day of toil and wonders saw Him, far from gratitude and from want, in a desert place in prayer. When He would send forth His apostles, that great step in advance, in which lay the germ of so much, was preceded by solitary prayer. When the fickle crowd desired to make Him the centre of political revolution, He passed from their hands and beat back that earliest attempt to secularise His work, by prayer. When the seventy brought the first tidings of mighty works done

in His name, He showed us how to repel the dangers of success, in that He thanked the Lord of heaven and earth who had revealed these things to babes. When He stood by the grave of Lazarus, the voice that waked the dead was preceded by the voice of prayer, as it ever must be. When He had said all that He could say to His disciples, He crowned all with His wonderful prayer for Himself, for them, and for us all. When the horror of great darkness fell upon His soul, the growing agony is marked by His more fervent prayer, so wondrously compact of shrinking fear and filial submission. When the cross was hid in the darkness of eclipse, the only words from the gloom were words of prayer. When, Godlike, He dismissed His spirit, manlike He commended it to His Father, and sent the prayer from His dying lips before Him to herald His coming into the unseen world. One instance remains, even more to our present purpose than all these—'It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him.' Mighty mystery! In Him, too, the Son's desire is connected with the Father's gift, and the unmeasured possession of the Spirit was an answer to *His* prayer.

Then, brethren, let us lift our voices and our hearts. That which ascends as prayer descends as blessing, like the vapour that is drawn up by the kiss of the sun to fall in freshening rain. 'Call upon Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and hidden things which thou knowest not.'

IV. The answering call from God to Zion.

Our truest prayers are but the echo of God's promises. God's best answers are the echo of our prayers. As in

two mirrors set opposite to each other, the same image is repeated over and over again, the reflection of a reflection, so here, within the prayer, gleams an earlier promise, within the answer is mirrored the prayer.

And in that reverberation, and giving back to us our petition transformed into a command, we are not to see a dismissal of it as if we had misapprehended our true want. It is not tantamount to, Do not ask me to put on my strength, but array yourselves in your own. The very opposite interpretation is the true one. The prayer of Zion is heard and answered. God awakes, and clothes Himself with might. Then, as some warrior king, himself roused from sleep and girded with flashing steel, bids the clarion sound through the grey twilight to summon the prostrate ranks that lie round his tent, so the sign of God's awaking and the first act of His conquering might is this trumpet call—'The night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us put off the works of darkness,'—the night gear that was fit for slumber—'and put on the armour of light,' the mail of purity that gleams and glitters even in the dim dawn. God's awaking is our awaking. He puts on strength by making us strong; for His arm works through us, clothing itself, as it were, with our arm of flesh, and perfecting itself even in our weakness.

Nor is it to be forgotten that this, like all God's commands, carries in its heart a promise. That earliest word of God's is the type of all His latter behests: 'Let there be light,' and the mighty syllables were creative and self-fulfilling. So ever, with Him, to enjoin and to bestow are one and the same, and His command is His conveyance of power. He rouses us by His summons, He clothes us with power in the very act of bid-

ding us put it on. So He answers the Church's cry by stimulating us to quickened zeal, and making us more conscious of, and confident in, the strength which, in answer to our cry, He pours into our limbs.

But the main point which I would insist on in what remains of this sermon, is the practical discipline which this divine summons requires from us.

And first, let us remember that the chief means of quickened life and strength is deepened communion with Christ.

As we have been saying, our strength is ours by continual derivation from Him. It has no independent existence, any more than a sunbeam could have, severed from the sun. It is ours only in the sense that it flows through us, as a river through the land which it enriches. It is His whilst it is ours, it is ours when we know it to be His. Then, clearly, the first thing to do must be to keep the channels free by which it flows into our souls, and to maintain the connection with the great Fountainhead unimpaired. Put a dam across the stream, and the effect will be like the drying up of Jordan before Israel: 'the waters that were above rose up upon an heap, and the waters that were beneath failed and were cut off,' and the foul oozy bed was disclosed to the light of day. It is only by constant contact with Christ that we have any strength to put on.

That communion with Him is no mere idle or passive attitude, but the active employment of our whole nature with His truth, and with Him whom the truth reveals. The understanding must be brought into contact with the principles of His word, the heart must touch and beat against His heart, the will meekly lay its hand in His, the conscience draw at once its anodyne

and its stimulus from His sacrifice, the passions know His finger on the reins, and follow, led in the silken leash of love. Then, if I may so say, Elisha's miracle will be repeated in nobler form, and from Himself, the Life thus touching all our being, life will flow into our deadness. 'He put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm.' So, dear brethren, all our practical duty is summed up in that one word, the measure of our obedience to which is the measure of all our strength—'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.'

Again, this summons calls us to the faithful use of the power which, on condition of that communion, we have.

There is no doubt a temptation, in all times like the present, to look for some new and extraordinary forms of blessing, and to substitute such expectation for present work with our present strength. There is nothing new to look for. There is no need to wait for anything more than we possess. Remember the homely old proverb, 'You never know what you can do till you try,' and though we are conscious of much unfitness, and would sometimes gladly wait till our limbs are stronger, let us brace ourselves for the work, assured that in it strength will be given to us that equals our desire. There is a wonderful power in honest work to develop latent energies and reveal a man to himself. I suppose, in most cases, no one is half so much surprised at a great man's greatest deeds as he is himself. They say that there is dormant electric energy enough in a few raindrops to make a thunderstorm, and there is dor-

mant spiritual force enough in the weakest of us to flash into beneficent light, and peal notes of awaking into many a deaf ear. The effort to serve your Lord will reveal to you strength that you know not. And it will increase the strength which it brings into play, as the used muscles grow like whipcord, and the practised fingers become deft at their task, and every faculty employed is increased, and every gift wrapped in a napkin melts like ice folded in a cloth, according to that solemn law, 'To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.'

Then be sure that to its last particle you are using the strength you have, ere you complain of not having enough for your tasks. Take heed of the vagrant expectations that wait for they know not what, and the apparent prayers that are really substitutes for possible service. 'Why liest thou on thy face? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.'

The Church's resources are sufficient for the Church's work, if the resources are used. We are tempted to doubt it, by reason of our experience of failure and our consciousness of weakness. We are more than ever tempted to doubt it to-day, when so many wise men are telling us that our Christ is a phantom, our God a stream of tendency, our Gospel a decaying error, our hope for the world a dream, and our work in the world done. We stand before our Master with doubtful hearts, and, as we look along the ranks sitting there on the green grass, and then at the poor provisions which make all our store, we are sometimes tempted almost to think that He errs when He says with that strange calmness of His, 'They need not depart, give ye them to eat.' But go out among the crowds and give confi-

dently what you have, and you will find that you have enough and to spare. If ever our stores seem inadequate, it is because they are reckoned up by sense, which takes cognizance of the visible, instead of by faith which beholds the real. Certainly five loaves and two small fishes are not enough, but are not five loaves and two small fishes and a miracle-working hand behind them, enough? It is poor calculation that leaves out Christ from the estimate of our forces. The weakest man and Jesus to back him are more than all antagonism, more than sufficient for all duty. Be not seduced into doubt of your power, or of your success, by others' sneers, or by your own faint-heartedness. The confidence of ability is ability. 'Screw your courage to the sticking place,' and you will *not* fail—and see to it that you use the resources you have, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 'Put on *thy* strength, O Zion.'

So, dear brethren, to gather all up in a sentence, let us confidently look for times of blessing, penitently acknowledge that our own faithlessness has hindered the arm of the Lord, earnestly beseech Him to come in His rejoicing strength, and, drawing ever fresh power from constant communion with our dear Lord, use it to its last drop for Him. Then, like the mortal leader of Israel, as he pondered doubtingly with sunken eyes on the hard task before his untrained host, we shall look up and be aware of the presence of the sworded angel, the immortal Captain of the host of the Lord, standing ready to save, 'putting on righteousness as a breastplate, an helmet of salvation on His head, and clad with zeal as a cloak.' From His lips, which give what they command, comes the call, 'Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the

evil day, and having done all, to stand.' Hearkening to His voice, the city of the strong ones shall be made an heap before our wondering ranks, and the land shall lie open to our conquering march.

Wheresoever *we* lift up the cry, 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord,' there follows, swift as the thunderclap on the lightning flash, the rousing summons, 'Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem!' Wheresoever it is obeyed there will follow in due time the joyful chorus, as in this context, 'Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; the Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.'

A PARADOX OF SELLING AND BUYING

'Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money.'—ISAIAH lii. 3.

THE first reference of these words is of course to the Captivity. They come in the midst of a grand prophecy of freedom, all full of leaping gladness and buoyant hope. The Seer speaks to the captives; they had 'sold themselves for nought.' What had they gained by their departure from God?—bondage. What had they won in exchange for their freedom?—only the hard service of Babylon. As Deuteronomy puts it: 'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness . . . by reason of the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies . . . in want of all things.' A wise exchange! a good market they had brought their goods to! In striking ironical parallel the prophet goes on to say that so should they be redeemed. They had got nothing by bondage, they should give nothing for liberty.

This text has its highest application in regard to our captivity and our redemption.

I. The reality of the captivity.

The true idea of bondage is that of coercion of will and conscience, the dominance and tyranny of what has no right to rule. So men are really in bondage when they think themselves most free. The only real slavery is that in which we are tied and bound by our own passions and lusts. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin.' He thinks himself master of himself and his actions, and boasts that he has broken away from the restraints of obedience, but really he has only exchanged masters. What a Master to reject—and what a master to prefer!

II. The voluntariness of the captivity.

'Ye have sold *yourselves*,' and become authors of your own bondage. No sin is forced upon any man, and no one is to blame for it but himself. The many excuses which people make to themselves are hollow. Now-a-days we hear a great deal of heredity, how a man is what his ancestors have made him, and of organisation, how a man is what his body makes him, and of environment, how a man is what his surroundings make him. There is much truth in all that, and men's guilt is much diminished by circumstances, training, and temperament. The amount of responsibility is not for us to settle, in regard to others, or even in regard to ourselves. But all that does not touch the fact that we ourselves have sold ourselves. No false brethren have sold us as they did Joseph.

The strong tendency of human nature is always to throw the blame on some one else; God or the devil, the flesh or the world, it does not matter which. But it re-

mains true that every man sinning is 'drawn away of *his own* lust and enticed.'

After all, conscience witnesses to the truth, and by that mysterious sense of guilt and gnawing of remorse which is quite different from the sense of mistake, tears to tatters the sophistries. Nothing is more truly my own than my sin.

III. The profitlessness of the captivity.

'For nought'; that is a picturesque way of putting the truth that all sinful life fails to satisfy a man. The meaning of one of the Hebrew words for sin is 'missing the mark.' It is a blunder as well as a crime. It is trying to draw water from broken cisterns. It is 'as when a hungry man dreameth and behold he eateth, but he awaketh and his soul is empty.' Sin buys men with fairy money, which looks like gold, but in the morning is found to be but a handful of yellow and faded leaves. 'Why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread?' It cannot but be so, for only God can satisfy a man, and only in doing His will are we sure of sowing seed which will yield us bread enough and to spare, and nothing but bread. In all other harvests, tares mingle and they yield poisoned flour. We never get what we aim at when we do wrong, for what we aim at is not the mere physical or other satisfaction which the temptation offers us, but rest of soul—and that we do *not* get. And we are sure to get something that we did not aim at or look for—a wounded conscience, a worsened nature, often hurts to health or reputation, and other consequent ills, that were carefully kept out of sight, while we were being seduced by the siren voice. The old story of the traitress, who bargained to let the enemies into the city, if they would give her 'what they wore on

their left arms,' meaning bracelets, and was crushed to death under their shields heaped on her, is repeated in the experience of every man who listens to the 'juggling fiends, who keep the word of promise to the ear, but break it to the hope.' The truth of this is attested by a cloud of witnesses. Conscience and experience answer the question, 'What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?' Wasted lives answer; tyrannous evil habits answer; diseased bodies, blighted reputations, bitter memories answer.

IV. The unbought freedom.

'Ye shall be redeemed without money.' You gained nothing by your bondage; you need give nothing for your emancipation. The original reference is, of course, to the great act of divine power which set these literal captives free, not for price nor reward. As in the Exodus from Egypt, so in that from Babylon, no ransom was paid, but a nation of bondsmen was set at liberty without war or compensation. That was a strange thing in history. The paradox of buying back without buying is a symbol of the Christian redemption.

(1) A price has been paid.

'Ye were redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.' The New Testament idea of redemption, no doubt, has its roots in the Old Testament provisions for the Goel or kinsman redeemer, who was to procure the freedom of a kinsman. But whatever figurative elements may enter into it, its core is the ethical truth that Christ's death is the means by which the bonds of sin are broken. There is much in the many-sided applications and powers of that Death which we do not know, but this is clear, that by it the power of sin is destroyed and the guilt of sin taken away.

(2) That price has been paid for all.

We have therefore nothing to pay. A slave cannot redeem himself, for all that he has is his master's already. So, no efforts of ours can set ourselves free from the 'cords of our sins.' Men try to bring something of their own. 'I do my best and God will have mercy.' We will bring our own penitence, efforts, good works, or rely on Church ordinances, or anything rather than sue *in formâ pauperis*. How hard it is to get men to see that 'It is finished,' and to come and rest only on the mere mercy of God.

How do we ally ourselves with that completed work? By simple faith, of which an essential is the recognition that we have nothing and can do nothing.

Suppose an Israelite in Babylon who did not choose to avail himself of the offered freedom; he must die in bondage. So must we if we refuse to have eternal life as the gift of God. The prophet's paradoxical invitation, 'He that hath no money, come ye, buy . . . without money,' is easily solved. The price is to give up ourselves and forsake all self-willed striving after self-purchased freedom which is but subtler bondage. 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' If not, then are ye slaves indeed, having 'sold yourselves for nought,' and declined to be 'redeemed without money.'

CLEAN CARRIERS

'Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.'—Isaiah lii. 11.

The context points to a great deliverance. It is a good example of the prophetical habit of casting prophecies of the future into the mould of the past. The features of the Exodus are repeated, but some of them are set aside. This deliverance, whatever it be, is to be after the pat-

tern of that old story, but with very significant differences. Then, the departing Israelites had spoiled the Egyptians and come out, laden with silver and gold which had been poured into their hands; now there is to be no bringing out of anything which was tainted with the foulness of the land of captivity. Then the priests had borne the sacred vessels for sacrifice, now they are to exercise the same holy function, and for its discharge purity is demanded. Then, they had gone out in haste; now, there is to be no precipitate flight, but calmly, as those who are guided by God for their leader, and shielded from all pursuit by God as their rearward, the men of this new Exodus are to take their march from the new Egypt.

No doubt the nearest fulfilment is to be found in the Return from Babylon, and the narrative in Ezra may be taken as a remarkable parallel to the prophecy here. But the restriction to Babylon must seem impossible to any reader who interprets aright the significance of the context, and observes that our text follows the grand words of verse 10, and precedes the Messianic prophecy of verse 13 and of ch. liii. To such a reader the principle will not be doubtful according to which Egypt and Babylon are transparencies through which mightier forms shine, and a more wonderful and world-wide making bare of the arm of the Lord is seen. Christ's great redemption is the highest interpretation of these words; and the trumpet-call of our text is addressed to all who have become partakers of it.

So Paul quotes the text in 2 Cor. vi. 17, blending with it other words which are gathered from more than one passage of Scripture. We may then take the whole as giving the laws of the new Exodus, and also as shadowing certain great peculiarities connected with it, by which it surpasses all the former deliverances.

I. The Pilgrims of this new Exodus.

A true Christian is a pilgrim, not only because he, like all men, is passing through a life which is transient, but because he is consciously detached from the Visible and Present, as a consequence of his conscious attachment to the Unseen and Eternal. What is said in Hebrews of Abraham is true of all inheritors of his faith: 'dwelling in tabernacles, for he looked for the city.'

II. The priests.

Priests and Levites bore the sacred vessels. All Christians are priests. The only true priesthood is Christ's, ours is derived from Him. In that universal priesthood of believers are included the privileges and obligations of

a. Access to God—Communion.

b. Offering spiritual sacrifices. Service and self-surrender.

c. Mediation with men.

Proclamation. Intercession. Thus follows

d. Bearing the holy vessels. A sacred deposit is entrusted to them—the honour and name of God; the treasure of the Gospel.

III. The separation that becomes pilgrims.

'Come out and be ye separate.' The very meaning of our Christian profession is separation. There is ludicrous inconsistency in saying that we are Christians and not being pilgrims. Of course, the separation is not to be worked out by mere external asceticism or withdrawal from the world. That has been so thoroughly preached and practised of late years that we much need the other side to be put. There should be some plain difference between the life of Christians and that of men whose portion is in this life. They should differ in the aspect under which all outward things are regarded.

To a Christian they are to be means to an end, and ever to be felt to be evanescent. They should differ in the motive for action, which should, for a Christian, ever be the love of God. They should differ in that a Christian abstains from much which non-Christians feel free to do, and often has to say, 'So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.' He who marches light marches quickly and marches far; to bring the treasures of Egypt along with us, is apt to retard our steps.

IV. The purity that becomes priests.

The Levites would cleanse themselves before taking up the holy vessels. And for us, clean hands and a pure heart are essential. There is no communion with God without these; a small speck of dust in the eye blinds us. There is no sacrificial service without them. No efficient work among men can be done without them. One main cause of the weakness of our Christian testimony is the imperfection of character in the witnesses, which is more powerful than all talk and often neutralises much effort. Keen eyes are watching us.

The consciousness of our own impurity should send us to Jesus, with the prayer and the confidence, 'Cleanse me and I shall be clean.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' 'He hath loosed us from our sins and made us kings and priests to God.'

MARCHING ORDERS

'Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. 12. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward.'—ISAIAH lii. 11, 12.

THESE ringing notes are parts of a highly poetic picture of that great deliverance which inspired this prophet's most exalted strains. It is described with constant allu-

sion to the first Exodus, but also with significant differences. Now no doubt the actual historical return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity is the object that fills the foreground of this vision, but it by no means exhausts its significance. The restriction of the prophecy to that more immediate fulfilment may well seem impossible when we note that my text follows the grand promise that 'all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God,' and immediately precedes the Messianic prophecy of the fifty-third chapter. Egypt was transparent, and through it shone Babylon; Babylon was transparent, and through it shone Christ's redemption. That was the real and highest fulfilment of the prophet's anticipations, and the trumpet-calls of my text are addressed to all who have a share in it. We have, then, here, under highly metaphorical forms, the grand ideal of the Christian life; and I desire to note briefly its various features.

I. First, then, we have it set forth as a march of warrior priests.

Note that phrase—'Ye that bear the vessels of the Lord.' The returning exiles as a whole are so addressed, but the significance of the expression, and the precise metaphor which it is meant to convey, may be questionable. The word rendered 'vessel' is a wide expression, meaning any kind of equipment, and in other places of the Old Testament the whole phrase rendered here, 'ye that bear the vessels,' is translated 'armour-bearers.' Such an image would be quite congruous with the context here, in which warlike figures abound. And if so, the picture would be that of an army on the march, each man carrying some of the weapons of the great Captain and Leader. But perhaps the other explanation is more likely, which regards 'the vessels of the Lord' as being

an allusion to the sacrificial and other implements of worship, which, in the first Exodus, the Levites carried on the march. And if that be the meaning, as seems more congruous with the command of purity which is deduced from the function of bearing the vessels, then the figure here, of course, is that of a company of priests. I venture to throw the two ideas together, and to say that we may here find an ideal of the Christian community as being a great company of warrior-priests on the march, guarding a sacred deposit which has been committed to their charge.

Look, then, at that combination in the true Christian character of the two apparently opposite ideas of warrior and priest. It suggests that all the life is to be conflict, and that all the conflict is to be worship; that everywhere, in the thick of the fight, we may still bear the remembrance of the 'secret place of the most High.' It suggests, too, that the warfare is worship, that the offices of the priest and of the warrior are one and the same thing, and both consist in their mediating between man and God, bringing God in His Gospel to men, and bringing men through their faith to God. The combination suggests, likewise, how, in the true Christian character, there ought ever to be blended, in strange harmony, the virtues of the soldier and the qualities of the priest; compassion for the ignorant and them that are out of the way, with courage; meekness with strength; a quiet, placable heart hating strife, joined to a spirit that cheerily fronts every danger and is eager for the conflict in which evil is the foe and God the helper. The old Crusaders went to battle with the Cross on their hearts, and on their shoulders, and on the hilts of their swords; and we, too, in all our warfare, have to

remember that its weapons are not carnal but spiritual, and that only then do we fight as the Captain of our salvation fought, when our arms are meekness and pity, and our warfare is waged in gentleness and love.

Note, further, that in this phrase we have the old, old metaphor of life as a march, but so modified as to lose all its melancholy and weariness and to become an elevating hope. The idea which runs through all poetry, of life as a journey, suggests effort, monotonous change, a uniform law of variety and transiency, struggle and weariness, but the Christian thought of life, while preserving the idea of change, modifies it into the blessed thought of progress. Life, if it is as Christ meant it to be, is a journey in the sense that it is a continuous effort, not unsuccessful, toward a clearly discerned goal, our eternal home. The Christian march is a march from slavery to freedom, and from a foreign land to our native soil.

Again, this metaphor suggests that this company of marching priests have in charge a sacred deposit. Paul speaks of the 'glorious Gospel which was committed to my trust.' 'That good thing which was committed unto thee by the Holy Ghost, keep.' The history of the return from Babylon in the Book of Ezra presents a remarkable parallel to the language of my text, for there we are told how, in the preparation for the march, the leader entrusted the sacred vessels of the temple, which the liberality of the heathen king had returned to him, to a group of Levites and priests, weighing them at the beginning, and bidding them keep them safe until they were weighed again in the courts of the Lord's house in Jerusalem.

And, in like manner, to us Christians is given the

charge of God's great weapons of warfare, with which He contends with the wickedness of the world—viz. that great message of salvation through, and in, the Cross of Jesus Christ. And there are committed to us, further, to guard sedulously, and to keep bright and untarnished and undiminished in weight and worth, the precious treasures of the Christian life of communion with Him. And we may give another application to the figure and think of the solemn trust which is put into our hands, in the gift of our own selves, which we ourselves can either waste, and stain, and lose, or can guard and polish into vessels 'meet for the Master's use.'

Gathering, then, these ideas together, we take this as the ideal of the Christian community—a company of priests on the march, with a sacred deposit committed to their trust. If we reflected more on such a conception of the Christian life, we should more earnestly hearken to, and more sedulously discharge, the commands that are built thereon. To these commands I now turn.

II. Note the separation that befits the marching company.

'Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing, go ye out of the midst of her.' In the historical fulfilment of my text, separation from Babylon was the preliminary of the march. Our task is not so simple; our separation from Babylon must be the constant accompaniment of our march. And day by day it has to be repeated, if we would lift a foot in advance upon the road. There is still a Babylon. The order in the midst of which we live is not organised on the fundamental laws of Christ's Kingdom. And wherever there are men who seek to order their lives as Christ would have them to be ordered, the first necessity for

them is, 'Come out from amongst them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.' There is no need in this day to warn Christian people against an exaggerated interpretation of these commandments. I almost wish there were more need. We have been told so often, in late years, of how Christian men ought to mingle with all the affairs of life, and count nothing that is human foreign to themselves, that it seems to me there is vast need for a little emphasis being put on the other side of the truth, and for separation being insisted upon. Wherever there is a real grasp of Jesus Christ for a man's own personal Saviour, and a true submission to Him as the Pattern and Guide of life, a broad line of demarcation between that man and the irreligious life round him will draw itself. If the heart have its tendrils twined round the Cross, it will have detached them from the world around. Separation by reason of an entirely different conception of life, separation because the present does not look to you as it looks to the men who see only it, separation because you and they have not only a different ideal and theory of life, but are living from different motives and for different ends and by different powers, will be the inevitable result of any real union with Jesus Christ. If I am joined to Him I am separated from the world; and detachment from it is the simple and necessary result of any real attachment to Him. There will always be a gulf in feeling, in purpose, in view, and therefore there will often have to be separation outward things. 'So did not I because of the fear of the Lord' will have to be said over and over again by any real and honest follower of the Master.

This separation will not only be the result of union with Jesus Christ, but it is the condition of all progress

in our union with Him. We must be unmoored before we can advance. Many a caravan has broken down in African exploration for no other reason than because it was too well provided with equipments, and so collapsed of its own weight. Therefore, our prophet in the context says, 'Touch no unclean thing.' *There* is one of the differences between the new Exodus and the old. When Israel came out of Egypt they spoiled the Egyptians, and came away laden with gold and jewels; but it is dangerous work bringing anything away from Babylon with us. Its treasure has to be left if we would march close behind our Lord and Master. We must touch 'no unclean thing,' because our hands are to be filled with the 'vessels of the Lord.' I am preaching no impossible asceticism, no misanthropical withdrawal from the duties of life, and the obligations that we owe to society. God's world is a good one; man's world is a bad one. It is man's world that we have to leave, but the loftiest sanctity requires no abstention from anything that God has ordained.

Now, dear friends, I venture to think that this message is one that we all dreadfully need to-day. There are a great many Christians, so-called, in this generation, who seem to think that the main object they should have in view is to obliterate the distinction between themselves and the world of ungodly men, and in occupation and amusements to be as like people that have no religion as they possibly can manage. So they get credit for being 'liberal' Christians, and praise from quarters whose praise is censure, and whose approval ought to make a Christian man very uncomfortable. Better by far the narrowest Puritanism—I was going to say better by far monkish austerities—than a Christianity which

knows no self-denial, which is perfectly at home in an irreligious atmosphere, and which resents the exhortation to separation, because it would fain keep the things that it is bidden to drop. God's reiteration of the text through Paul to the Church in luxurious, corrupt, wealthy Corinth is a gospel for this day for English Christians, 'Come out from among them, and I will receive you.'

III. Further, note the purity which becomes the bearers of the vessels of the Lord.

'Be ye clean.' The priest's hands must be pure, which figure, being translated, is that transparent purity of conduct and character is demanded from all Christian men who profess to bear God's sacred deposit. You cannot carry it unless your hands are clean, for all the gifts that God gives us glide from our grasp if our hands be stained. Monkish legends tell of sacred pictures and vessels which, when an impure touch was laid upon them, refused to be lifted from their place, and grew there, as rooted, in spite of all efforts to move them. Whoever seeks to hold the gifts of God in His Gospel in dirty hands will fail miserably in the attempt; and all the joy and peace of communion, the assurance of God's love, and the calm hope of immortal life will vanish as a soap bubble, grasped by a child, turns into a drop of foul water on its palm, if we try to hold them in foul hands. Be clean, or you cannot bear the vessels of the Lord.

And further, remember that no priestly service nor any successful warfare for Jesus Christ is possible, except on the same condition. One sin, as well as one sinner, destroys much good, and a little inconsistency on the part of us professing Christians neutralises all the efforts that we may ever try to put forth for Him. Logic re-

quires that God's vessels should be carried with clean hands. God requires it, men require it, and have a right to require it. The mightiest witness for Him is the witness of a pure life, and if we go about the world professing to be His messengers, and carrying His epistle in our dirty fingers, the soiled thumb-mark upon it will prevent men from caring for the message; and the Word will be despised because of the unworthiness of its bearers. 'Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.'

IV. Lastly, notice the leisurely confidence which should mark the march that is guarded by God. 'Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward.'

This is partly an analogy and partly a contrast with the story of the first Exodus. The unusual word translated 'with haste' is employed in the Pentateuch to describe the hurry and bustle, not altogether due to the urgency of the Egyptians, but partly also to the terror of Israel, with which that first flight was conducted. And, says my text, in this new coming out of bondage there shall be no need for tremor or perturbation, lending wings to any man's feet; but, with quiet deliberation, like that with which Peter was brought out of his dungeon, because God knew that He could bring him out safely, the new Exodus shall be carried on.

'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Why should he? There is no need for a Christian man ever to be flurried, or to lose his self-command, or ever to be in an undignified and unheroic hurry. His march should be unceasing, swift, but calm and equable, as the motions of the planets, unhasting and unresting.

There is a very good reason why we need not be in any

haste due to alarm. For, as in the first Exodus, the guiding pillar led the march, and sometimes, when there were foes behind, as at the Red Sea, shifted its place to the rear, so 'the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward.' He besets us behind and before, going in front to be our Guide, and in the rear for our protection, gathering up the stragglers, so that there shall not be 'a hoof left behind,' and putting a wall of iron between us and the swarms of hovering enemies that hang on our march. Thus encircled by God, we shall be safe. Christ fulfils what the prophet pledged God to do; for He goes before us, the Pattern, the Captain of our salvation, the Forerunner, 'the Breaker is gone up before them'; and He comes behind us to guard us from evil; for He is 'the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the ending, the Almighty.'

Dear brethren, life for us all must be a weary pilgrimage. We cannot alter that. It is the lot of every son of man. But we have the power of either making it a dreary, solitary tramp over an undefended desert, to end in the great darkness, or else of making it a march in which the twin sisters Joy and Peace shall lead us forth, and go out with us, and the other pair of angel-forms, 'Goodness and Mercy,' shall follow us all the days of our lives. We may make it a journey with Jesus for Guide and Companion, to Jesus as our Home. 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads.'

THE ARM OF THE LORD

'To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?'—Isaiah liii. 1.

In the second Isaiah there are numerous references to 'the arm of the Lord.' It is a natural symbol of the active energy of Jehovah, and is analogous to the other symbol of 'the Face of Jehovah,' which is also found in this book, in so far as it emphasises the notion of power in manifestation, though 'the Face' has a wider range and may be explained as equivalent to that part of the divine Nature which is turned to men. The latter symbol will then be substantially parallel with 'the Name.' But there are traces of a tendency to conceive of 'the arm of the Lord' as personified, for instance, where we read (ch. lxiii. 12) that Jehovah 'caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses.' Moses was not the true leader, but was himself led and sustained by the divine Power, dimly conceived as a person, ever by his side to sustain and direct. There seems to be a similar imperfect consciousness of personification in the words of the text, especially when taken in their close connection with the immediately following prophecy of the suffering servant. It would be doing violence to the gradual development of Revelation, like tearing asunder the just-opening petals of a rose, to read into this question of the sad prophet full-blown Christian truth, but it would be missing a clear anticipation of that truth to fail to recognise the forecasting of it that *is* here.

I. We have here a prophetic forecast that the arm of the Lord is a person.

The strict monotheism of the Old Testament does not preclude some very remarkable phenomena in its modes of conception and speech as to the divine Nature. We

hear of the 'angel of His face,' and again of 'the angel in whom is His Name.' We hear of 'the angel' to whom divine worship is addressed and who speaks, as we may say, in a divine dialect and does divine acts. We meet, too, with the personification of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, to which are ascribed characteristics and are attributed acts scarcely distinguishable from divine, and eminently associated in the creative work. Our text points in the same direction as these representations. They all tend in the direction of preparing for the full Christian truth of the personal 'Power of God.' What was shown by glimpses 'at sundry times and in divers manners,' with many gaps in the showing and much left all unshown, is perfectly revealed in the Son. The New Testament, by its teaching as to 'the Eternal Word,' endorses, clears, and expands all these earlier dimmer adumbrations. That Word is the agent of the divine energy, and the conception of power as being exercised by the Word is even loftier than that of it as put forth by 'the arm,' by as much as intelligent and intelligible utterance is more spiritual and higher than force of muscle. The apostolic designation of Jesus as 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' blends the two ideas of these two symbols. The conception of Jesus Christ as the arm of the Lord, when united with that of the Eternal Word, points to a threefold sphere and manner of His operations, as the personal manifestation of the active power of God. In the beginning, the arm of the Lord stretched out the heavens as a tent to dwell in, and without Him 'was not anything made that was made.' In His Incarnation, He carried into execution all God's purposes and fulfilled His whole will. From His throne He wields divine power, and rules the universe. 'The

help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself,' and He works in the midst of humanity that redeeming work which none but He can effect.

II. We have here a prophetic paradox that the mightiest revelation of the arm of the Lord is in weakness.

The words of the text stand in closest connection with the great picture of the Suffering Servant which follows, and the pathetic figure portrayed there is the revealing of the arm of the Lord. The close bringing together of the ideas of majesty and power and of humiliation, suffering, and weakness, would be a paradox to the first hearers of the prophecy. Its solution lies in the historical manifestation of Jesus. Looking on Him, we see that the growing up of that root out of a dry ground was the revelation of the great power of God. In Jesus' lowly humanity God's power is made perfect in man's weakness, in another and not less true sense than that in which the apostle spoke. There we see divine power in its noblest form, in its grandest operation, in its widest sweep, in its loftiest purpose. That humble man, lowly and poor, despised and rejected in life, hanging faint and pallid on the Roman cross, and dying in the dark, seems a strange manifestation of the 'glory' of God, but the Cross is indeed His throne, and sublime as are the other forms in which Omnipotence clothes itself, this is, to human eyes and hearts, the highest of them all. In Jesus the arm of the Lord is revealed in its grandest operation. Creation and the continual sustaining of a universe are great, but redemption is greater. It is infinitely more to say, 'He giveth power to the faint,' than to say, 'For that He is strong in might, not one faileth,' and to principalities and powers in heavenly places who have gazed on the grand operations of divine power for ages, new

lessons of what it can effect are taught by the redemption of sinful men. The divine power that is enshrined in Jesus' weakness is power in its widest sweep, for it is to every one that believeth, and in its loftiest purpose, for it is 'unto salvation.'

III. We have here a prophetic lament that the power revealed to all is unseen by many.

The text is a wail over darkened eyes, blind at noonday. The prophet's radiant anticipations of the Servant's exaltation, and of God's holy arm being made bare in the eyes of all nations, are clouded over by the thought of the incredulity of the multitude to 'our report.' Jehovah had indeed 'made bare His arm,' as a warrior throws back his loose robe, when he would strike. But what was the use of that, if dull eyes would not look? The 'report' had been loudly proclaimed, but what was the use of that, if ears were obstinately stopped? Alas, alas! nothing that God can do secures that men shall see what He shows, or listen to what He speaks. The mystery of mysteries is that men can, the tragedy of tragedies is that they will, make any possible revelation of none effect, so far as they are concerned.

The Arm is revealed, but only by those who have 'believed our report' does the prophet deem it to be actually beheld. Faith is the individual condition on which the perfected revelation becomes a revelation to me. The 'salvation of our God' is shown in splendour to 'all the ends of the earth,' but only they who exercise faith in Jesus, who is the power of God, will see that far-shining light. If we are not of those who 'believe the report,' we shall, notwithstanding that 'He hath made bare His holy arm,' be of those who grope at noonday as in the dark.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT—I

'For He grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3. He was despised, and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.'—ISAIAH liii. 2, 3.

To hold fast the fulfilment of this prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Jesus it is not necessary to deny its reference to Israel. Just as offices, institutions, and persons in it were prophetic, and by their failures to realise to the full their own *rôle*, no less than by their partial presentation of it, pointed onwards to Him, in whom their idea would finally take form and substance, so this great picture of God's Servant, which was but imperfectly reproduced even by the Israel within Israel, stood on the prophet's page a fair though sad dream, with nothing corresponding to it in the region of reality and history, till He came and lived and suffered.

If we venture to make it the theme of a short series of sermons, our object is simply to endeavour to bring out clearly the features of the wonderful portrait. If they are fully apprehended, it seems to us that the question of who is the original of the picture answers itself. We must note that the whole is introduced by a 'For,' that is to say, that it is all explanatory of the unbelief and blindness to the revealed arm of the Lord, which the prophet has just been lamenting. This close connection with the preceding words accounts for the striking way in which the description of the person of the Servant is here blended with, or interrupted by, that of the manner in which he was treated.

I. The Servant's lowly origin and growth.

'He *grew*,'—not '*shall* grow.' The whole is cast into the form of history, and to begin the description with a

future tense is not only an error in grammar but gratuitously introduces an incongruity. The word rendered 'tender plant' means a sucker, and 'root' probably would more properly be taken as a shoot from a root, the tree having been felled, and nothing left but the stump. There is here, then, at the outset, an unmistakable reference to the prophecy in ch. xi. 1, which is Messianic prophecy, and therefore there is a presumption that this too has a Messianic reference. In the original passage the stump or 'stock' is explained as being the humiliated house of David, and it is only following the indications supplied by the fact of the second Isaiah's quotation of the first, if we take the implication in his words to be the same. Royal descent, but from a royal house fallen on evil days, is the plain meaning here.

And the eclipse of its glory is further brought out in that not only does the shoot spring from a tree, all whose leafy honours have long been lopped away, but which is 'in a dry ground.' Surely we do not force a profounder meaning than is legitimate into this feature of the picture when we think of the Carpenter's Son 'of the house and lineage of David,' of the Son of God 'who was found in fashion as a man,' of Him who was born in a stable, and grew up in a tiny village hidden away among the hills of Galilee, who, as it were, stole into the world 'not with observation,' and opened out, as He grew, the wondrous blossom of a perfect humanity such as had never before been evolved from any root, nor grown on the most sedulously cultured plant. Is this part of the prophet's ideal realised in any of the other suggested realisations of it?

But there is still another point in regard to the origin and growth of the lowly shoot from the felled stump—it is 'before Him.' Then the unnoticed growth is noticed

by Jehovah, and, though cared for by no others, is cared for, tended, and guarded, by Him.

II. The Servant's unattractive form.

Naturally a shoot springing in a dry ground would show but little beauty of foliage or flower. It would be starved and colourless beside the gaudy growths in fertile, well-watered gardens. But that unattractiveness is not absolute or real; it is only 'that *we* should desire Him.' We are but poor judges of true 'form or comeliness,' and what is lustrous with perfect beauty in God's eyes may be, and generally is, plain and dowdy in men's. Our tastes are debased. Flaunting vulgarities and self-assertive ugliness captivate vulgar eyes, to which the serene beauties of mere goodness seem insipid. Cockatoos charm savages to whom the iridescent neck of a dove has no charms. Surely this part of the description fits Jesus as it does no other. The entire absence of outward show, or of all that pleases the spoiled tastes of sinful men, need not be dwelt on. No doubt the world has slowly come to recognise in Him the moral ideal, a perfect man, but He has been educating it for nineteen hundred years to get it up to that point, and the educational process is very far from complete. The real desire of most men is for something much more pungent and dashing than Jesus' meek wisdom and stainless purity, which breed in them ennui rather than longing. 'Not this man but Barabbas,' was the approximate realisation of the Jewish ideal then; not this man but—some type or other of a less oppressive perfection, and that calls for less effort to imitate it, is the world's real cry still. Pilate's scornfully wondering question: Art *Thou*—such a poor-looking creature—the King of the Jews? is very much of a piece with the world's question still: Art Thou

the perfect instance of manhood? Art Thou the highest revelation of God?

III. The Servant's reception by men.

The two preceding characteristics naturally result in this third. For lowliness of condition and lack of qualities appealing to men's false ideals will certainly lead to being 'despised and rejected.' The latter expression is probably better taken, as in the margin of the Rev. Ver. as 'forsaken.' But whichever meaning is adopted, what an Iliad of woes is condensed into these two words! 'The spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes,' the loneliness of one who, in all the crowd descries none to trust—these are the wages that the world ever gives to its noblest, who live but to help it and be misunderstood by it, and as these are the wages of all who with self-devotion would serve God by serving the world for its good, they were paid in largest measure to '*the* Servant of the Lord.' His claims were ridiculed, His words of wisdom thrown back on Himself; none were so poor but could afford to despise Him as lower than they, His love was repulsed, surely He drank the bitterest cup of contempt. All His life He walked in the solitude of uncomprehended aims, and at His hour of extremest need appealed in vain for a little solace of companionship, and was deserted by those whom He trusted most. His was a lifelong martyrdom inflicted by men. His was a lifelong solitude which was most utter at the last. And He brought it all on Himself because He *would* be God's Servant in being men's Saviour.

IV. The Servant's sorrow of heart.

The remarkable expression 'acquainted with grief' seems to carry an allusion to the previous clause, in which men are spoken of as despising and rejecting the

Servant. They left Him alone, and His only companion was 'grief'—a grim associate to walk at a man's side all his days! It is to be noted that the word rendered 'grief' is literally sickness. That description of mental or spiritual sorrows under the imagery of bodily sicknesses is intensified in the subsequent terrible picture of Him as one from whom men hide their faces with disgust at His hideous appearance, caused by disease. Possibly the meaning may rather be that He hides His face, as lepers had to do.

Now probably the 'sorrows' touched on at this point are to be distinguished from those which subsequently are spoken of in terms of such poignancy as laid on the Servant by God. Here the prophet is thinking rather of those which fell on Him by reason of men's rejection and desertion. We shall not rightly estimate the sorrowfulness of Christ's sorrows, unless we bring to our meditations on them the other thought of His joys. How great these were we can judge, when we remember that He told the disciples that by His joy remaining in them their joy would be full. As much joy then as human nature was capable of from perfect purity, filial obedience, trust, and unbroken communion with God, so much was Jesus' permanent experience. The golden cup of His pure nature was ever full to the brim with the richest wine of joy. And that constant experience of gladness in the Father and in Himself made more painful the sorrows which He encountered, like a biting wind shrieking round Him, whenever He passed out from fellowship with God in the stillness of His soul into the contemptuous and hostile world. His spirit carrying with it the still atmosphere of the Holy Place, would feel more keenly than any other would have done the jarring tu-

mult of the crowds, and would know a sharper pain when met with greetings in which was no kindness. Jesus was sinless, His sympathy with all sorrow was thereby rendered abnormally keen, and He made others' griefs His own with an identification born of a sympathy which the most compassionate cannot attain. The greater the love, the greater the sorrow of the loving heart when its love is spurned. The intenser the yearning for companionship, the sharper the pang when it is repulsed. The more one longs to bless, the more one suffers when his blessings are flung off. Jesus was the most sensitive, the most sympathetic, the most loving soul that ever dwelt in flesh. He saw, as none other has ever seen, man's miseries. He experienced, as none else has ever experienced, man's ingratitude, and, therefore, though God, even His God, 'anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows,' He was 'a Man of Sorrows,' and grief was His companion during all His life's course.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT—II

'Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. 6. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid (made to light) on Him the iniquity of us all.'—ISAIAH liii. 4–6.

THE note struck lightly in the close of the preceding paragraph becomes dominant here. One notes the accumulation of expressions for suffering, crowded into these verses—griefs, sorrows, wounded, bruised, smitten, chastisement, stripes. One notes that the cause of all this multiform infliction is given with like emphasis of reiter-

ation—our griefs, our sorrows, and that these afflictions are invested with a still more tragic and mysterious aspect, by being traced to our transgressions, our iniquities. Finally, the deepest word of all is spoken when the whole mystery of the servant's sufferings is referred to Jehovah's making the universal iniquity to lie, like a crushing burden, on Him.

I. The Burdened Servant.

It is to be kept in view that the 'griefs' which the servant is here described as bearing are literally 'sicknesses,' and that, similarly, the 'sorrows' may be diseases. Matthew in his quotation of the verse (viii. 17) takes the words to refer to bodily ailments, and finds their 'fulfilment' in Christ's miracles of healing. And that interpretation is part of the whole truth, for Hebrew thought drew no such sharp line of distinction between diseases of the body and those of the soul as we are accustomed to draw. All sickness was taken to be the consequence of sin, and the intimate connection between the two was, as it were, set forth for all forms of bodily disease by the elaborate treatment prescribed for leprosy, as pre-eminently fitted to stand as type of the whole. But the fulfilment through the miracles is but a parable of the deeper fulfilment in regard to the more virulent and deadly diseases of the soul. Sin is the sickness, as it is also the grief, which most afflicts humanity. Of the two words expressing the Servant's taking their burden on His shoulders, the former implies not only the taking of it but the bearing of it away, and the latter emphasises the weight of the load.

Following Matthew's lead, we may regard Christ's miracles of healing as one form of His fulfilment of the prophecy, in which the principles that shape all the forms

are at work, and which, therefore, may stand as a kind of pictorial illustration of the way in which He bears and bears away the heavier burden of sin. And one point which comes out clearly is that, in these acts of healing, He felt the weight of the affliction that He took away. Even in that region, the condition of ability to remove it, was identifying Himself with the sorrow. Did He not 'sigh and look up' in silent appeal to heaven before He could say, Ephphatha? Did He not groan in Himself before He sent the voice into the tomb which the dead heard? His miracles were not easy, though He had all power, for He felt all that the sufferers felt, by the identifying power of the unparalleled sympathy of a pure nature. In that region His pain on account of the sufferers stood in vital relation with His power to end their sufferings. The load must gall His shoulders, ere He could bear it away from theirs.

But the same principles as apply to these deeds of mercy done on diseases apply to all His deeds of deliverance from sorrow and from sin. In Him is set forth in highest fashion the condition of all brotherly help and alleviation. Whoever would lighten a brother's load must stoop his own shoulders to carry it. And whilst there is an element in our Lord's sufferings, as the text passes on to say, which is not explained by the analogy with what is required from all human succourers and healers, the extent to which the lower experience of such corresponds with His unique work should always be made prominent in our devout meditations.

II. The Servant's sufferings in their reason, their intensity, and their issue.

The same measure that was meted out to Job by his so-called friends was measured to the servant, and at

the impulse of the same heartless doctrinal prepossession. He must have been bad to suffer so much; that is the rough and ready verdict of the self-righteous. With crashing emphasis, that complacent explanation of the Servant's sufferings and their own prosperity is shivered to atoms, by the statement of the true reason for both the one and the other. You thought that He was afflicted because He was bad and you were spared because you were good—no, He was afflicted because *you* were bad, and you were spared because He was afflicted.

The reason for the Servant's sufferings was 'our transgressions.' More is suggested now than sympathetic identification with others' sorrows. This is an actual bearing of the consequences of sins which He had not committed, and that not merely as an innocent man may be overwhelmed by the flood of evil which has been let loose by others' sins to sweep over the earth. The blow that wounds Him is struck directly and solely at Him. He is not entangled in a widespread calamity, but is the only victim. It is pre-supposed that all transgression leads to wounds and bruises; but the transgressions are done by us, and the wounds and bruises fall on Him. Can the idea of vicarious suffering be more plainly set forth?

The intensity of the Servant's sufferings is brought home to our hearts by the accumulation of epithets, to which reference has already been made. He was 'wounded' as one who is pierced by a sharp sword; 'bruised' as one who is stoned to death; beaten and with livid weales on His flesh. A background of unnamed persecutors is dimly seen. The description moves altogether in the region of physical violence, and that violence is more than symbol.

It is no mere coincidence that the story of the Passion reproduces so many of the details of the prophecy, for, although the fulfilment of the latter does not depend on such coincidences, they are not to be passed by as of no importance. Former generations made too much of the physical sufferings of Jesus; is not this generation in danger of making too little of them?

The issue of the Servant's sufferings is presented in a startling paradox. His bruises and weales are the causes of our being healed. His chastisement brings our peace. Surely it is very hard work, and needs much forcing of words and much determination not to see what is set forth in as plain light as can be conceived, to strike the idea of atonement out of this prophecy. It says as emphatically as words can say, that we have by our sins deserved stripes, that the Servant bears the stripes which we have deserved, and that therefore we do not bear them.

III. The deepest ground of the Servant's sufferings.

The sad picture of humanity painted in that simile of a scattered flock lays stress on the universality of transgression, on its divisive effect, on the solitude of sin, and on its essential characteristic as being self-willed rejection of control. But the isolation caused by transgression is blessedly counteracted by the concentration of the sin of all on the Servant. Men fighting for their own hand, and living at their own pleasure, are working to the disruption of all sweet bonds of fellowship. But God, in knitting together all the black burdens into one, and loading the Servant with that tremendous weight, is preparing for the establishment of a more blessed unity, in experience of the healing brought about by His sufferings.

Can one man's 'iniquity,' as distinguished from the consequences of iniquity, be made to press upon any other? It is a familiar and not very profound objection to the Christian Atonement that guilt cannot be transferred. True, but in the first place, Christ's nature stands in vital relations to every man, of such intimacy that what is impossible between two of us is not impossible between Christ and any one of us; and, secondly, much in His life, and still more in His passion, is unintelligible unless the black mass of the world's sin was heaped upon Him, to His own consciousness. In that dread cry, wrung from Him as He hung there in the dark, the consciousnesses of possessing God and of having lost Him are blended inextricably and inexplicably. The only approach to an explanation of it is that then the world's sin was felt by Him, in all its terrible mass and blackness, coming between Him and God, even as our own sins come, separating us from God. That grim burden not only came on Him, but was *laid* on Him by God. The same idea is expressed by the prophet in that awful representation and by Jesus in that as awful cry, 'Why hast Thou *forsaken* Me?'

The prophet constructs no theory of Atonement. But no language could be chosen that would more plainly set forth the fact of Atonement. And it is to be observed that, so far as this prophecy is concerned, the Servant's sole form of service is to suffer. He is not a teacher, an example, or a benefactor, in any of the other ways in which men need help. His work is to bear our griefs and be bruised for our healing.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT—III

'He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself and opened not His mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, He opened not His mouth. 8. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living? for the transgression of my people was He stricken. 9. And they made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; although He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.'—ISAIAH liii. 7–9. R. V.

IN this section of the prophecy we pass from contemplating the sufferings inflicted on the Servant to the attitude of Himself and of His contemporaries towards these, His patience and their blindness. To these is added a remarkable reference to His burial, which strikes one at first sight as interrupting the continuity of the prophecy, but on fuller consideration assumes great significance.

I. The unresisting endurance of the Servant.

The Revised Version's rendering of the first clause is preferable to that of the Authorised Version. 'Afflicted' would be little better than tautology, but 'humbled Himself' strikes the keynote of the verse, which dwells not on the Servant's afflictions, but on His bearing under them. Similarly, the pathetic imagery of the lamb led and the sheep dumb gives the same double representation, first of the indignities, and next of His demeanour in enduring them, as is conveyed in 'He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself.' Unremonstrating, unresisting endurance, then, is the point emphasised in the lovely metaphor.

We recall the fact that this emphatically reduplicated phrase 'opened not His mouth' was verbally fulfilled in our Lord's silence before each of the three authorities to whom He was presented, before the Jewish rulers, before Pilate, and before Herod. Only when adjured by

the living God and when silence would have been tantamount to withdrawal of His claims, did He speak before the Sanhedrin. Only when silence would have been taken as disowning His Kingship, did He speak before Pilate. And Herod, who had no right to question Him, received no answer at all. Jesus' lips were opened in witness but never in complaint or remonstrance. No doubt, the prophecy would have been as really fulfilled though there had been no such majestic silences, for its substance is patient endurance, not mere abstinence from speech. Still, as with other events in His life, the verbal correspondence with prophetic details may help, and be meant to help, to bring out more clearly, for purblind eyes, the true fulfilment. So we may meditate on the wonder and the beauty of that picture which the evangelists draw, and which the world has recognised, with whatever differences as to its interpretation, as the most perfect, pathetic, and majestic picture of meek endurance that has ever been painted.

But we gather only the most superficial of its lessons, if that is all that we find to say about it. For the main point for us to lay to heart is not merely the fact of that silent submission, but the motive which led to it. He opened not His mouth, because He willingly embraced the Cross, and He willingly embraced the Cross because He loved the Father and would do His will, because He loved the world and would be its Saviour.

That touching imagery of the dumb lamb has manifold felicities and significances beyond serving to figure meekness. And we are not forcing unintended meanings into a mere piece of poetic imagination when we note how remarkably the metaphor links on to that of strayed sheep in the preceding verse, or when we ven-

ture to recall John Baptist's first proclamation of the Lamb of God, and Peter's quotation of this very prophecy, and the continual recurrence in the Apocalypse of the name of The Lamb as *the* title of honour of 'Him who sitteth on the throne.' A kind of nimbus or aureole shines round the humble figure as drawn by the prophet.

II. The misunderstood end of the Servant's life.

The difficult expressions of verse 8 are rendered in the Revised Version with clearness and so as to yield a profound meaning. We may note that here, for the first time, is spoken out that end to which all the preceding description of sufferings has been leading up, and yet it is spoken with a kind of solemn reticence, very impressive. The Servant is 'taken away,' 'cut off,' 'stricken.' Not yet is the grim word 'death' plainly uttered; that comes in the next verse, only after the Servant's death is supposed to be past. The three words suggest, at all events, though in half-veiled language, violence and suddenness in the Servant's fate. Who were the agents who took Him, cut Him off and struck Him, is left in impressive obscurity. But the fact that His death was a judicial murder is set in clear light. Whether we read 'By' or 'From—oppression and judgment He was taken away,' the forms of law are represented as wrested to bring about flagrant injustice. And, if it were my object now to defend the Messianic interpretation, one might ask where any facts corresponding to this element in the picture are to be found in regard to either the national Israel, or the Israel within the nation.

That unjust death by illegal violence under the mask of law was, further, wholly misunderstood by 'His

generation.' We need not do more than remark in a sentence how that feature corresponds with the facts in regard to Jesus, and ask whether it does so on any other theory of 'fulfilment.' Neither friends nor foes had even the faintest conception of what the death of Jesus was or was to effect. And it is worth while to dwell for a moment on this, because we are often told that there is no trace of the doctrine of an atoning sacrifice in the Gospels, and the inference is drawn that it was an afterthought of the apostles, and therefore to be set aside as an excrescence on Christianity according to Christ. The silence of Jesus on that subject is exaggerated; but certainly no thought of His being the Sacrifice for the sins of the world was in the minds of the sad watchers by the Cross, nor for many a day thereafter. Is it not worth noting that precisely such a blindness to the meaning of His death had been prophesied eight hundred years before?

But the reason why this feature is introduced seems mainly to be to underscore the lesson, that those who exercised the violence which hurried the Servant from the land of the living were blind instruments of a higher power. And may we not also see in it a suggestion of the great solitude of sorrow in which the Servant was to die, even as He had lived in it? Misapprehended and despised He lived, misapprehended He died. Jesus was the loneliest man that ever breathed human breath. He gave up His breath in a more awful solitude than ever isolated any other dying man. Utterly solitary, He died that none of us need ever face death alone.

III. The Servant's Grave.

Following on the mystery of the uncomprehended death comes the enigma of the burial. The words are

an enigma, but they seem meaningless on any hypothesis but the Messianic one. As they stand, they assert that unnamed persons gave Him a grave with the wicked, as they would do by putting Him to death under strained forms of law, and that then, somehow, the criminal destined to be buried with other criminals in a dishonoured grave was laid in a tomb with the rich. It seems a singularly minute trait to find place in such a prophecy. The remarks already made as to similar minute correspondences in details of the prophecy with purely external facts in Christ's life need not be repeated now. One does not see that it is a self-evident axiom needing only to be enunciated in order to be accepted, that such minute prophecies are beneath the dignity of revelation. It might rather seem that, as one element in prophecy, they are eminently valuable. The smaller the detail, the more remarkable the prevision and the more striking the fulfilment. For a keen-sighted man may forecast tendencies and go far to anticipate events on the large scale, but only God can foresee trifles. The difficulty in which this prediction of the Servant's grave being 'with the rich' places those who reject the Messianic reference of the prophecy to our Lord may be measured by the desperate attempts to evade it by suggesting other readings, or by making 'rich' to be synonymous with 'wicked.' The words as they stand have a clear and worthy meaning on one interpretation, and we even venture to say, on one interpretation only, namely, that they refer to the reverent laying of the body of the Lord in the new tomb belonging to 'a certain rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph.'

If in the latter clause of verse 9 we render 'Because'

rather than 'Although,' we get the thought that the burial was a sign that the Servant, slain as a criminal, yet was not a criminal. The criminals were either left unburied or disgraced by promiscuous interment in an unclean place. But that body reverently bedewed with tears, wrapped in fine linen clean and white, softly laid down by loving hands, watched by love stronger than death, lay in fitting repose as the corpse of a King till He came forth as a Conqueror. So once more the dominant note is struck, and this part of the prophecy closes with the emphatic repetition of the sinlessness of the Suffering Servant, which makes His sufferings a deep and bewildering mystery, unless they were endured because of 'our transgressions.'

THE SUFFERING SERVANT—IV

'It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.' —ISAIAH liii. 10.

WE have seen a distinct progress of thought in the preceding verses. There was first the outline of the sorrows and rejection of the Servant; second, the profound explanation of these as being for us; third, the sufferings, death and burial of the Servant.

We have followed Him to the grave. What more can there be to be said? Whether the Servant of the Lord be an individual or a collective or an ideal, surely all fitness of metaphor, all reality of fact would require that His work should be represented as ending with His life, and that what might follow His burial should be the influence of His memory, the continued operation of the principles He had set agoing and so on, but nothing more.

Now observe that, however we may explain the fact,

this is the fact to be explained, that there is a whole section, this closing one, devoted to the celebration of His work after His death and burial, and, still more remarkable, that the prophecy says nothing about His activity on the world till *after* death. In all the former portion there is not a syllable about His doing anything, only about His suffering; and then when He is dead He begins to work. That is the subject of these last three verses, and it would be proper to take them all for our consideration now, but for two reasons, one, because of their great fulness and importance, and one because, as you will observe, the two latter verses are a direct address of God's concerning the Servant. The prophetic words, spoken as in his own person, end with verse 10, and, catching up their representations, expanding, defining, glorifying them, comes the solemn thunder of the voice of God. I now deal only with the prophet's vision of the work of the Servant of the Lord.

One other preliminary remark is that the work of the Servant after death is described in these verses with constant and very emphatic reference to His previous sufferings. The closeness of connection between these two is thus thrown into great prominence.

I. The mystery of God's treatment of the sinless Servant.

The first clause is to be read in immediate connection with the preceding verse. The Servant was of absolute sinlessness, and yet the Divine Hand crushed and bruised Him. Certainly, if we think of the vehemence of prophetic rebukes, and of the standing doctrine of the Old Testament that Israel was punished for its sin, we shall be slow to believe that this picture of the Sinless One, smitten for the sins of others, can have reference

to the nation in any of its parts, or to any one man. However other poetry may lament over innocent sufferers, the Old Testament always takes the ground: 'Our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away.' But mark that here, however understood, the prophet paints a figure so sinless that God's bruising Him is an outstanding wonder and riddle, only to be solved by regarding these bruises as the stripes by which our sins were healed, and by noting that 'the pleasure of the Lord' is carried on through Him, after and through His death. What conceivable application have such representations except to Jesus? We note, then, here:—

I. The solemn truth that His sufferings were divinely inflicted. That is a truth complementary to the other views in the prophecy, according to which these sufferings are variously regarded as either inflicted by men ('By oppression and judgment He was taken away') or drawn on Him by His own sacrificial act ('His soul shall make an offering for sin'). It was the divine counsel that used men as its instruments, though they were none the less guilty. The hands that 'crucified and slew' were no less 'the hands of lawless men,' because it was 'the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God' that 'delivered Him up.'

But a still deeper thought is in these words. For we can scarcely avoid seeing in them a glimpse into that dim region of eclipse and agony of soul from which, as from a cave of darkness, issued that last cry: 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani?' The bruises inflicted by the God, who made to meet on Him the iniquities of us all, were infinitely more severe than the weales of the soldiers' rods, or the wounds of the nails that pierced His hands and feet.

2. The staggering mystery of His sinlessness and sufferings.

The world has been full from of old of stories of goodness tortured and evil exalted, which have drawn tears and softened hearts, but which have also bewildered men who would fain believe in a righteous Governor and loving Father. But none of these have cast so black a shadow of suspicion on the government of the world by a good God as does the fate of Jesus, unless it is read in the light of this prophecy. Standing at the cross, faith in God's goodness and providence can scarcely survive, unless it rises to be faith in the atoning sacrifice of Him who was wounded there for our transgressions.

II. The Servant's work in His sufferings.

The margin of the Revised Version gives the best rendering—'His soul shall make an offering for sin.' The word employed for 'offering' means a trespass offering, and carries us at once back to the sacrificial system. The trespass offering was distinguished from other offerings. The central idea of it seems to have been to represent sin or guilt as *debt*, and the sacrifice as making compensation. We must keep in view the variety of ideas embodied in His sacrifice, and how all correspond to realities in our wants and spiritual experience.

Now there are three points here:—

a. The representation that Christ's death is a sacrifice. Clearly connecting with whole Mosaic system—and that in the sense of a trespass offering. Christ seems to quote this verse in John x. 15, when He speaks of laying down His life, and when He declares that He came to 'give His life a *ransom* for many.' At any rate here is the great word, sacrifice, proclaimed for the first time in connection with Messiah. Here the prophet interprets the meaning of all the types and shadows of the law.

That sacrificial system bore witness to deep wants of men's souls, and prophesied of One in whom these were all met and satisfied.

b. His voluntary surrender.

He is sacrifice, but He is Priest also. His soul makes the offering, and His soul is the offering and offers itself in concurrence with the Divine Will. It is difficult and necessary to keep that double aspect in view, and never to think of Jesus as an unwilling Victim, nor of God as angry and needing to be appeased by blood.

c. The thought that the true meaning of His sufferings is only reached when we contemplate the effects that have flowed from them. The pleasure of the Lord in bruising Him is a mystery until we see how pleasure of the Lord prospers in the hand of the Crucified.

III. The work of the Servant after death.

Surely this paradox, so baldly stated, is meant to be an enigma to startle and to rouse curiosity. This dead Servant is to see of the travail of His soul, and to prolong His days. All the interpretations of this chapter which refuse to see Jesus in it shiver on this rock. What a contrast there is between platitudes about the spirit of the nation rising transformed from its grave of captivity (which was only very partially the case), and the historical fulfilment in Jesus Christ! Here, at any rate, hundreds of years before His Resurrection, is a word that seems to point to such a fact, and to me it appears that all fair interpretation is on the side of the Messianic reference.

Note the singularity of special points.

a. Having died, the Servant sees His offspring.

The sacrifice of Christ is the great power which draws men to Him, and moves to repentance, faith, love. His

death was the communication of life. Nowhere else in the world's history is the teacher's death the beginning of His gathering of pupils, and not only has the dead Servant children, but He *sees* them. That representation is expressive of the mutual intercourse, strange and deep, whereby we feel that He is truly with us, 'Jesus Christ, whom having not seen we love.'

b. Having died, the Servant prolongs His days.

He lives a continuous life, without an end, for ever. The best commentary is the word which John heard, as he felt the hand of the Christ laid on his prostrate form: 'I became dead, and lo, I am alive for evermore.'

c. Having died, the Servant carries into effect the divine purposes.

'Prosper' implies progressive advancement. Christ's Sacrifice carried out the divine pleasure, and by His Sacrifice the divine pleasure is further carried out.

If Christ is the means of carrying out the divine purpose, consider what this implies of divinity in His nature, of correspondence between His will and the divine.

But Jesus not only carries into effect the divine purpose as a consequence of a past act, but by His present energy this dead man is a living power in the world today. Is He not?

The sole explanation of the vitality of Christianity, and the sole reason which makes its message a gospel to any soul, is Christ's death for the world and present life in the world.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT—V

'He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; and He shall bear their iniquities.'—ISAIAH liii. 11.

THESE are all but the closing words of this great prophecy, and are the fitting crown of all that has gone be-

fore. We have been listening to the voice of a member of the race to whom the Servant of the Lord belonged, whether we limit that to the Jewish people or include in it all humanity. That voice has been confessing for the speaker and his brethren their common misapprehensions of the Servant, their blindness to the meaning of His sufferings and the mystery of His death. It has been proclaiming the true significance of these as now he had learned them, and has in verse 10 touched the mystery of the reward and triumph of the Servant.

That note of His glory and coronation is caught up in the two closing verses, which, in substance, are the continuation of the idea of verse 10. But this identity of substance makes the variety of form the more emphatic. Observe the '*My* Servant' of verse 11, and the '*I* will divide' of verse 12. These oblige us to take this as the voice of God. The confession and belief of earth is hushed, that the recognition and the reward of the Servant may be declared from heaven. An added solemnity is thus given to the words, and the prophecy comes round again to the keynote on which it started in chapter lii. 13, '*My* Servant.' Notice, too, how the same characteristic is here as in verse 10—that the recapitulation of the sufferings is almost equally prominent with the description of the reward. The two are so woven together that no power can part them. We may take these two verses as setting forth mainly two things—the divine promise that the Servant shall give righteousness to many, and the divine promise that the Servant shall conquer many for Himself.

As to the exposition, 'of' here is probably casual, not partitive, as the Authorised Version has it; 'travail' is not to be understood in the sense of childbirth, but of

toil and suffering; 'soul' is equivalent to *life*. This fruit of His soul's travail is further defined in the words which follow. The great result which will be beheld by Him and will fill and content His heart is that 'by His knowledge He shall justify many.' 'By *His* knowledge' certainly means, by the knowledge of Him on the part of others. The phrase might be taken either objectively or subjectively, but it seems to me that only the former yields an adequate sense. 'My righteous servant' is scarcely emphatic enough. The words in the original stand in an unusual order, which might be represented by 'the righteous one, My servant,' and is intended to put emphasis on the Servant's righteousness, as well as to suggest the connection between His righteousness and His 'justifying,' in virtue of His being righteous. 'Justify' is an unusual form, and means to procure for, or impart righteousness to. '*The* many' has stress on the article, and is the antithesis not to *all*, but to *few*. We might render it 'the masses,' an indefinite expression, which if not declaring universality, approaches very near to it, as in Romans v. 19 and Matthew xxvi. 28. 'He shall bear,' a future referring to the Servant in a state of exaltation, and pointing to His continuous work after death. This bearing is the root of our righteousness.

We may put the thoughts here in a definite order.

I. The great work which the Servant carries on.

It consists in giving or imparting righteousness. It seems to me that it is out of place to be too narrow here in interpreting so as to draw distinctions between righteousness imparted and righteousness bestowed. We should rather take the general idea of *making righteous*, making, in fact, like Himself.

Note that this is the work which is Christ's characteristic one. All thoughts of His blessings to the world which omit that are imperfect.

II. The preparation for that making of us righteous.

The roots of our being made righteous by the righteous Servant are found in His bearing our sins. His sin-bearing work is basis of our righteousness. Christ justifies men by giving to them His own righteousness, and taking in turn their sins on Himself that He may expiate them.

Not only 'did He bear our sins in His own body on the tree,' but He *will* bear them in His exaltation to the Throne, and only because He continuously and eternally does so are we justified on earth and shall we be sanctified in heaven.

III. The condition on which He imparts righteousness.

'His knowledge,' which is to be taken in the profound Biblical sense as including not only understanding but experience also.

Parallels are found in 'This is life eternal to know Thee' (John xvii. 3), and in 'That I may know Him' (Phil. iii. 10). So this prophecy comes very near to the New Testament proclamation of righteousness by faith.

IV. The grand sweep of the Servant's work.

'The many' is indefinite, and its very indefiniteness approximates it to universality. A shadowy vision of a great multitude that no man can number stretches out, as to the horizon, before the prophet. How many they are he knows not. He knows that they are numerous enough to 'satisfy' the Servant for all His sufferings. He knows, too, that there is no limit to the happy crowd except that which is set by the necessary condition of joining the bands of 'the justified'—

namely, 'the knowledge of Him.' They who receive the benefits which the Servant has died and will live to bring cannot be few; they may be all. If any are shut out, they are self-excluded.

V. The Servant's satisfaction.

It may be that the word employed means 'full,' rather than 'content,' but the latter idea can scarcely be altogether absent from it. We have, then, the great hope that the Servant, gazing on the results of His sufferings, will be content, content to have borne them, content with what they have effected.

'The glory dies not and the grief is past.'

And the 'grief' has had for fruit not only 'glory' gathering round the thorn-pierced head, but reflected glory shining on the brows of 'the many,' whom He has justified and sanctified by their experience of Him and His power. The creative week ended with the 'rest' of the Creator, not because His energy was tired and needed repose, but because He had fully carried out His purpose, and saw the perfected idea embodied in a creation that was 'very good.' The redemptive work ends with the Servant's satisfied contemplation of the many whom He has made like Himself, His better creation.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT—VI

'Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.'—ISAIAH liii. 12.

THE first clause of this verse is somewhat difficult. There are two ways of understanding it. One is that adopted in A. V., according to which the suffering Servant is represented as equal to the greatest conquerors. He is to be as gloriously successful in His victory as

they have been in theirs. But there are two very strong objections to this rendering—first, that it takes 'the many' in the sense of *mighty*, thus obscuring the identity of the expression here and in the previous verse and in the end of this verse; and secondly, that it gives a very feeble and frigid ending to the prophecy. It does not seem a worthy close simply to say that the Servant is to be like a Cyrus or a Nebuchadnezzar in His conquests.

The other rendering, though there are some difficulties, is to be preferred. According to it 'the many' and 'the strong' are themselves the prey or spoil. The words might be read, 'I will apportion to Him the many, and He shall apportion to Himself the strong ones.'

This retains the same meaning of 'many' for the same expression throughout the context, and is a worthy ending to the prophecy. The force of the clause is then to represent the suffering Servant as a conqueror, leading back from His conquests a long train of captives, a rich booty.

Notice some points about this closing metaphor.

Mark its singular contrast to the tone of the rest of the prophecy. Note the lowliness, the suffering, the minor key of it all, and then, all at once, the leap up to rapture and triumph. The special form of the metaphor strikes one as singular. Nothing in the preceding context even remotely suggests it. Even the previous clause about 'making the many righteous' does not do much to prepare the way for it. Whatever be our explanation of the words, it must be one that does full justice to this metaphor, and presents some conquering power or person, whose victories are brilliant and real

enough to be worthy to stand at the close of such a prophecy. We must keep in mind, too, what has been remarked on the two previous verses, that this victorious campaign and growing conquest is achieved after the Servant is dead. That is a paradox. And note that the strength of language representing His activity can scarcely be reconciled with the idea that it is only the post-mortem influence of His life which is meant.

Note, too, the singular blending of God's power and the Servant's own activity in the winning of this extended sovereignty. Side by side the two are put. The same verb is used in order to emphasise the intended parallel. 'I will divide,' 'He shall divide.' I will give Him—He shall conquer for Himself. Remember the intense vehemence with which the Old Testament guards the absolute supremacy of divine power, and how strongly it always puts the thought that God is everything and man nothing. Look at the contrast of the tone when a human conqueror, whose conquests are the result of God's providence, is addressed (xlv. 1–3). There is an entire suppression of his personality, not a word about his bravery, his military genius, or anything in him. It is all *I, I, I.* Remember how, in chapter x., one of the sins for which the Assyrian is to be destroyed is precisely that he thought of his victories as due to his own strength and wisdom. So he is indignantly reminded that he is only 'a staff in Mine hand,' the axe with which God hewed the nations, whereas here the voice of God Himself speaks, and gives a strange place beside Himself to the will and power of this Conqueror. This feature of the prophecy should be accounted for in any satisfactory interpretation.

Note, too, the wide sweep of the Servant's dominion,

which carries us back to the beginning of this prophecy in chapter lii. 15, where we hear of the Servant as 'sprinkling' (or startling') many nations, and the 'kings' is parallel with the 'strong' in this verse. No bounds are assigned to the Servant's conquests, which are, if not declared to be universal, at least indefinitely extended and striding on to world-wide empire.

These points are plainly here. I do not dilate upon them. But I ask whether any of the interpretations of these words, except one, gives adequate force to them? Is there anything in the history of the restored exiles which corresponds to this picture? Even if you admit the violent hypothesis that there was a better part of the nation, so good that the national sorrows had no chastisement for them, and the other violent hypothesis that the devoutest among the exiles suffered most, and the other that the death and burial and resurrection of the Servant only mean the reformation wrought on Israel by captivity. What is there in the history of Israel which can be pointed at as the conquest of the world? Was the nation that bore the yokes of a Ptolemy, an Antiochus, a Herod, a Cæsar, the fulfiller of this dream of world-conquest? There is only one thing which can be called the Jew conquering the world. It is that which, as I believe, is meant here, viz. Christ's conquest. Apart from that, I know of nothing which would not be ludicrously disproportionate if it were alleged as fulfilment of this glowing prophecy.

This prophetic picture is at least four hundred years before Christ, by the admission of those who bring it lowest down, in their eagerness to get rid of prophecy. The life of Christ does correspond to it, in such a way that, clause by clause, it reads as if it were quite as

much a history of Jesus as a prophecy of the Servant. This certainly is an extraordinary coincidence if it be not a prophecy. And there is really no argument against the Messianic interpretation, except dogmatic prejudice—'there cannot be prophecy.'

No straining is needed in order to fit this great prophetic picture of the world-Conqueror to Jesus. Even that, at first sight incongruous, picture of a victor leading long lines of captives, such as we see on Assyrian slabs and Egyptian paintings, is historically true of Him who 'leads captivity captive,' and is, through the ages, winning ever fresh victories, and leading His enemies, turned into lovers, in His triumphal progress. He, and He only, really owns men. His slaves have made real self-surrenders to Him. Other conquerors may imprison or load with irons or deport to other lands, but they are only lords of bodies. Jesus' chains are silken, and bind hearts that are proud of their bonds. He carries off His free prisoners 'from the power of darkness' into His kingdom of light. His slaves rejoice to say, 'I am not my own,' and he only truly possesses himself who has given himself away to the Conquering Christ. For all these centuries He has been conquering hearts, enthralling and thereby liberating wills, making Himself the life of lives. There is nothing else the least like the bond between Jesus and millions who never saw him. Who among all the leaders of thought or religious teachers has been able to impress his personality on others and to dominate them in the fashion that Jesus has done and is doing to-day? How has He done this thing, which no other man has been able in the least to do? What is His charm, the secret of His power? The prophet has no doubt what it

is, and unfolds it to us with a significant 'For.' We turn, then, to the prophetic explanation of that world-wide empire and note—

II. The foundation of the Servant's dominion.

That explanation is given in four clauses which fall into two pairs. They remarkably revert to the thought of the Servant's sufferings, but in how different a tone these are now spoken of, when they are no longer regarded as the results of man's blind failure to see His beauty, or as inflicted by the mysterious 'pleasure of Jehovah,' but as the causes of His triumph! Echoes of both the two first clauses are heard from the lips of Jesus. As He passed beneath the tremulous shadow of the olives of Gethsemane, He appealed for the companionship of the three, by an all but solitary revelation of His weakness and sorrow, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; abide ye here and watch with Me.' And even more distinctly did He lay His hand on this prophecy when He ended all His words in the upper room with 'This which is written must be fulfilled in Me, And He was reckoned with "transgressors."' May we not claim Jesus as endorsing the Messianic interpretation of this prophecy? He gazed on the portrait painted ages before that night of sorrow, and saw in it His own likeness, and said, That is meant for Me. Some of us feel that, *kenosis* or no *kenosis*, He is the best judge of who is the original of the prophet's portrait.

The two final clauses are separated from the preceding by the emphatic introduction of the pronominal nominative, and cohere closely as gathering up for the last time all the description of the Servant, and as laying broad and firm the basis of His dominion, in the

two great facts which sum up His office and between them stretch over the past and the future. 'He bare the sin of many, and maketh intercession for the transgressors.' The former of these two clauses brings up the pathetic picture of the scapegoat who 'bore upon him all their iniquities into a solitary land.' The Servant conquers hearts because He bears upon Him the grim burden which a mightier hand than Aaron's has made to meet on His head, and because He bears it away. The ancient ceremony, and the prophet's transference of the words describing it to his picture of the Servant who was to be King, floated before John the Baptist, when he pointed his brown, thin finger at Jesus and cried: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' The goat had borne the sins of one nation; the prophet had extended the Servant's ministry indefinitely, so as to include unnumbered 'many'; John spoke the universal word, 'the world.' So the circles widened.

But it is not enough to bear away sins. We need continuous help in the present. Our daily struggles, our ever-felt weakness, all the ills that flesh is heir to, cry aloud for a mightier than we to be at our sides. So on the Servant's bearing the sins of the many there follows a continuous act of priestly intercession, in which, not merely by prayer, but by meritorious and prevailing intervention, He makes His own the cause of the many whose sins He has borne.

On these two acts His dominion rests. Sacrifice and Intercession are the foundations of His throne.

The empire of men's hearts falls to Him because of what He has done and is doing for them. He who is to possess us absolutely must give Himself to us utterly.

The empire falls to Him who supplies men's deepest need. He who can take away men's sins rules. He who can effectually undertake men's cause will be their King.

If Jesus is or does anything less or else, He will not rule men for ever. If He is but a Teacher and a Guide, oblivion, which shrouds all, will sooner or later wrap Him in its misty folds. That His name should so long have resisted its influence is due altogether to men having believed Him to be something else. He will exercise an everlasting dominion only if He have brought in an everlasting righteousness. He will sit King for ever, if and only if He is a priest for ever. All other rule is transient.

A remarkable characteristic of this entire prophecy is the frequent repetition of expressions conveying the idea of sufferings borne for others. In one form or another that thought occurs, as we reckon, eleven times, and it is especially frequent in the last verses of the chapter. Why this perpetual harking back to that one aspect? It is to be further noticed that throughout there is no hint of any other kind of work which this Servant had to do. He fulfils His service to God and man by being bruised for men's iniquities. He came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and the chief form of His ministry was that He gave His life a ransom for the many. He came not to preach a gospel, but to die that there might be a gospel to preach. The Cross is the centre of His work, and by it He becomes the Centre of the world.

Look once more at the sorrowful, august figure that rose before the prophet's eye—with its strange blending of sinlessness and sorrow, God's approval and God's

chastisement, rejection and rule, death and life, abject humiliation and absolute dominion. Listen to the last echoes of the prophet's voice as it dies on our ear—'He bore the sins of the many.' And then hearken how eight hundred years after another voice takes up the echoes—but instead of pointing away down the centuries, points to One at his side, and cries, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' Look at that life, that death, that grave, that resurrection, that growing dominion, that inexhaustible intercession—and say, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this?'

May we all be able to answer with clear confidence, 'These things saith Esaias when he saw *His* glory and spake of *Him*.' May we all take up the ancient confession: 'Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.'

THE PASSING AND THE PERMANENT

'For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.'—ISAIAH liv. 10.

THERE is something of music in the very sound of these words. The stately march of the grand English translation lends itself with wonderful beauty to the melody of Isaiah's words. But the thought that lies below them, sweeping as it does through the whole creation, and parting all things into the transient and eternal, the mortal and immortal, is still greater than the music of the words. These are removed; this abides. And the thing in God which abides is all-gentle tenderness, that strange love mightier than all the powers of Deity

beside, permanent with the permanence of His changeless heart. The mountains shall depart, the emblems of eternity shall crumble and change and pass, and the hills be removed; but this immortal, impalpable, and, in some men's minds, fantastic and unreal something, 'My loving kindness and the covenant of My peace,' shall outlast them all. And this great promise is stamped with the sign-manual of Heaven, being spoken by the Lord that hath mercy on thee.'

So then, dear friends, I think I shall most reverentially deal with these words if I handle them in the simplest possible way, and think, first of all, of that great antithesis that is set before us here—what passes and what abides; and, secondly, draw two or three plain, homely lessons and applications from the thoughts thus suggested.

I. First, then, we have to deal with the contrast between the apparently enduring which passes, and that which truly abides.

'The mountains depart, the hills remove, My lovingkindness shall not depart, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed.' Let me then say a word or two about that first thought—'the mountains shall depart.' There they tower over the plains, looking down upon the flat valley beneath as they did when the prophet spoke. The eternal buttresses of the hills stand to the eyes of the fleeting generations as emblems of permanence, and yet winter storms and summer heats, and the slow processes of decay which we call the gnawing of time, are ever working upon them, and changing their forms, and at last they shall pass. Modern science, whilst it has all but incalculably enlarged our conceptions of the duration of the material universe, empha-

sises, as faith alone never could, the thought of the ultimate perishing of this material world. For geology tells us that 'where rears the cliff there rolled the sea,' that through the cycles of the shifting history of the world there have been elevations and depressions so that the ancient hills in many places are the newest of all things, and the world's form has changed many and many a time since first it circled as a planet. And researches into the ultimate constitution of matter have taught us to think of solids and liquids and gases, as being an infinite multitude of atoms all in rapid motion with inconceivable velocity, and have shown us the very atoms in the act of breaking up. So that the old guess of the infancy of physical science which divined that 'all things are in a state of flux' is confirmed by its last utterances. Science prophesies too, and bids us expect that the earth shall one day become, like some of the stars, a burnt out mass of uniform temperature, incapable of change or of sustaining life, and shall end by falling into the diminished sun, and so the old word will be fulfilled that 'the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.' None should be able to utter the words of my text, 'The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed,' with such emphasis of certitude as the present students of physical science.

But our text does not stop there. It brings into view the transiency of the transient, in order to throw into greater relief and prominence the perpetuity of the abiding. If we had nothing abiding beyond this perishable material universe, it would indeed be misery to exist. Life would be not only insignificant but wretched, and a ghastly irony, a meaningless, aimless ripple on the surface of that silent, shoreless sea. The great 'But' of

this text lifts the oppression from humanity with which the one-sided truth of the passing of all the Visible loads it.

And so turn for a moment to the other side of this great text. There stands out above all that is mortal, which, although it counts its existence by millenniums, is but for an instant, visible to the eye of faith, the Great Spirit who moves all the material universe, Himself unmoved, and lives undiminished by creation, and undiminished if creation were swept out of existenc. Let that which may pass, pass; let that which can perish, perish; let the mountains crumble and the hills melt away; beyond the smoke and conflagration, and rising high above destruction and chaos, stands the calm throne of God, with a loving Heart upon it, with a council of peace and purpose of mercy for you and for me, the creatures of a day indeed, but who are to live when the days shall cease to be. 'My kindness!' What a wonderful word that is, so far above all the cold delusion of so-called theism! 'My kindness!' the tender-heartedness of an infinite love, the abounding favour of the Father of my spirit, His gentle goodness bending down to me, His tenderness round about me, eternal love that never can die; the thing that lasts in the universe is His kindness, which continues from everlasting to everlasting. What a revelation of God! Oh, dear friends, if only our hearts could open to the full acceptance of that thought, sorrow and care and anxiety, and every other form of trouble, would fade away and we should be at rest. The infinite, undying, imperishable love of God is mine. Older than the mountains, deeper than their roots, wider than the heavens, and stronger than all my sin, is the love that grasps me and keeps me and

will not let me go, and lavishes its tenderness upon me, and beseeches me, and pleads with me, and woos me, and rebukes me, and corrects me when I need, and sent His Son to die for me. 'My kindness shall not depart from thee.'

But even that great conception does not exhaust the encouragement which the prophet has to give to souls weighed upon with the transiency of the material. He speaks of 'the covenant of My peace.' We are to think of this great, tender, changeless love of God, which underlies all things and towers above all things, which overlaps them all and fills eternity, as being placed, so to speak, under the guarantee of a solemn obligation. God's covenant is a great thought of Scripture which we far too little apprehend in the depth and power of its meaning. His covenant with you and me, poor creatures, is this, 'I promise that My love shall never leave thee.' He makes Himself a constitutional monarch, so to speak, giving us a plighted word to which we can appeal and go to Him and say, 'There, that is the charter given by Thyself, given irrevocably for ever, and I hold Thee to it. Fulfil it, O Thou God of Truth!'

'My covenant of peace.' Dear friends, the prophet spoke a deeper thing than he knew when he uttered these words. Let me remind you of the large meaning which the New Testament puts into them. 'Now the God of Peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do His will.' God has bound Himself by His promise to give you and me the peace that belongs to His own nature, and that covenant is sealed to us in the blood of Jesus Christ upon the Cross,

and so we sinful men, with all the burden of our evil upon us, with all our sins known to us, with all our manifest failings and infirmities, can turn to Him and say, 'Thou hast pledged Thyself to forgive and accept, and that covenant is made sure to me because Thy Son hath died, and I come and ask Thee to fulfil it.' And be sure of this, that no poor creature upon earth, however lame his hand, who puts out that hand to grasp that peaceful covenant—that new covenant in the blood of Christ—can plead in vain.

My brother, have you done that? Have you entered into this covenant of peace with God—peace in believing, peace by the blood of Chirst, peace that fills a new heart, peace that rules amidst all the perturbations and disappointments of life? Then you may be sure that that covenant will stand for evermore, though the mountains depart and the hills be removed.

II. Now turn with me to a few practical lessons which we may gather from these great contrasts here, between the perishable mortal and the immortal divine love.

Surely the first plain one is a warning against fastening our love, our hope, or our trust on these transient things.

What folly it is for a man to risk his peace and the strength and the joy of his life upon things that crumble and change, when all the while there is lying before him open for his entrance, and wooing him to come into the eternal home of his spirit, this covenant! Here are we, from day to day, plunged into these passing vanities, and always tempted to think that they are the true abiding things, and it needs great discipline and watchfulness to live the better life. There is nothing that will help us to do it like a firm grasp of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Then we can hold these mortal joys

with a loose hand, knowing that they are only for a little time, and feeling that they are passing whilst we look at them, and are changing like the scenery in the sky on a summer's night, with its cliffs and hills in the clouds, even while we gaze. Where there was a mountain a moment ago up there, there is now a depression, and the world and everything in it lasts very little longer than these. It is only a film on the surface of the great sea of eternity—there is no reality about it. It is but a dream—a vision, slipping, slipping, slipping away, and you and I slipping along with it. How foolishly, how obstinately, we all cling to it, though even the very grasp of our hands tends to make it pass away, as the children coming in from the fields with their store of buttercups and daisies in their hot hands, which by their very clutch hasten the withering. And that is just our position. We have them for a brief moment, and they all perish in the using. Oh, brother, have you set your heart on that which is not, when all the while there, longing to bless and love us, stands the Eternal God, with His unchanging love and faithful covenant of His perpetual peace? Surely it were wiser—wiser, to put it on the lowest ground—to seek the things that are above, and, knowing as we do that the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, so make our portion the kindness which shall not depart, and seek our share in the peace that shall not pass away.

But there is another lesson to be put in the same simple fashion. Surely we ought to use thoughts like these of my text in order to stay the soul in seasons which come to every one sometimes, when we are made painfully conscious of the transiency of this Present. Meditative hours come to us all—moments when perhaps

some strain of music gives us back childhood's days; when perhaps some perfume of a flower reminds us of long-vanished gardens and hands that have crumbled into dust; when some touch of a sunset sky, or some word of a book, or some providence of our lives, comes upon the heart and mind, reminding us how everything is passing. You have all had these thoughts. Some of us stifle them—they are not pleasant to many of us; some of us brood over them unwholesomely, and that is not wise; but the best use of them is to bear us onward into the peaceful region where we clasp to our troubled hearts that which cannot go. If any of us are making experience to-day of earthly change, if any of us have hearts heavy with earthly losses, if any of us are bending under the weight of that awful law, that everything becomes part and parcel of that dreadful past, if any of us are looking at our empty hands and saying, 'They have taken away my god and what have I more?' let us listen to the better voice that says, 'My kindness shall not depart from thee, and so, whatever goes, thou canst not be desolate if thou hast Me.'

And then, still further, let me remind you that this same thought may avail to give to us hopes of years as immortal as itself. We do not belong to the mountains and hills that shall depart, or to the order of things to which they belong! There is coming a very solemn day, I believe, not by any mere processes of natural decay as I take it, but by the action of God Himself, the Judge—that 'day of the Lord that shall come as a thief in the night'—when the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, and the throne of judgment shall be set, and you and I will be there. My brother, lay your hand on that covenant of peace which is made for

us all in Christ Jesus the Lord, and then 'calm as the summer's ocean we shall be, and all the wreck of nature' cannot disturb us, for we shall abide unshaken as the throne of God. The mountains may pass, the hills be removed, but 'herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment,' for that kindness shall not depart from us, and God's gentle tenderness is eternal as Himself. Then we shall not depart from it either, and we are immortal as the tenderness that encloses us. God's endless love must have undying creatures on whom to pour itself out, and if to-day I possess—as we all may possess in however feeble a measure—some sips and prelibations of that great flood of love that is in God, I can look unblanched right into the eyes of death and say, 'Thou hast no power at all over me, I am eternal because the God that loves me is so, and since He hath loved me with an everlasting love, His loving-kindness shall not depart from me. Therefore, seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, I know that I have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and because He lives I shall live also.' The hope that is built upon the eternal love of God in Christ is the true guarantee to me of immortal existence, and this hope is ours if, and only if, we come into the covenant—the covenant of peace. God says, 'I will love thee, I will bless thee, I will keep thee, I will pardon thee, I will save thee, I will glorify thee, and there is My bond on that Cross, the new covenant in His blood.' Close with the covenant that God is ready to make with you, and then 'life and death, principalities and powers, things present and things to come, height and depth, and every other creature shall be impotent to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

THE CALL TO THE THIRSTY

'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. 3. Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. 4. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. 5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee. 6. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: 7. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 8. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. 9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. 10. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11. So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. 12. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.'—ISAIAH lv. 1–13.

THE call to partake of the blessings of the Messianic salvation worthily follows the great prophecy of the suffering Servant. No doubt the immediate application of this chapter is to the exiled nation, who in it are summoned from their vain attempts to find satisfaction in the material prosperity realised in exile, and to make the only true blessedness their own by obedience to God's voice. But if ever the prophet spoke to the world he does so here. It is no unwarranted spiritualising of his invitation which hears in it the voice which invites all mankind to share the blessings of the gospel feast.

The glorious words need little exposition. What we have to do is to see that they do not fall on our ears in vain. They may be roughly divided into two sections—

the invitation to the feast, with the promises to the obedient Israel (verses 1–5), and the summons to the necessary preparation for the feast, namely, repentance, with the reason for its necessity, and the encouragements to it in the might of God's faithful promises (verses 6–13).

I. Whose voice sounds so beseechingly and welcoming in this great call, which rings out to all thirsty souls? If we note the 'Me' and 'I' which follow, we shall hear God Himself thus taking the office of summoner to His own feast. By whatever media the gospel call reaches us, it is in reality God's own voice to our hearts, and that makes the responsibility of hearing more tremendous, and the folly of refusing more inexcusable.

Who are invited? There are but two conditions expressed in verse 1, and these are fulfilled in every soul. All are summoned who are thirsty and penniless. If we have in our souls desires that all the broken cisterns of earth can never slake—and we all have these—and if we have nothing by which we can procure what will still the gnawing hunger and burning thirst of our souls—and none of us has—then we are included in the call. Universal as are the craving for blessedness and the powerlessness to satisfy it, are the adaptation and destination of the gospel.

What is offered? Water, wine, milk—all the beverages of a simple civilisation, differing in their operation, but all precious to a thirsty palate. Water revives, wine gladdens and inspirits, milk nourishes. All that any man needs or desires is to be found in Christ. We shall not understand the nature of the feast unless we remember that He Himself is the 'gift of God.' What these three draughts mean is best perceived when we listen to Him saying, in a plain quotation of this call,

'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.' Nothing short of Himself can satisfy the thirst of one soul, much less of all the thirsty. Like the flow from the magic fountain of the legend, Jesus becomes to each what each most desires.

How does He become ours? The paradox of buying with what is not money is meant, by its very appearance of contradiction, to put in strongest fashion that the possession of Him depends on nothing in us but the sense of need and the willingness to accept. We buy Christ when we part with self, which is all that we have, in order to win Him. We must be full of conscious emptiness and desire, if we are to be filled with His fulness. Jesus interpreted the meaning of 'come to the waters' when He said, 'He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.' Faith is coming, faith is drinking, faith is buying.

The universal call, with its clear setting forth of blessing and conditions of possessing, is followed by a pleading remonstrance as to the folly of lavishing effort and money on what is not bread. It is strange that men will cheerfully take more pains to continue thirsty than to accept the satisfaction which God provides. They toil and continue unsatisfied. Experience does not teach them, and all the while the one real good is waiting to be theirs for nothing.

> 'Tis heaven alone that is given away;
> 'Tis only God may be had for the asking.'

Christ goes a-begging, and we spend our strength in vain toil to acquire what we turn away from when it is offered us in Him. When the great Father offers bread for nothing, we will not have it, but we are ready to

give any price for a stone. It is not the wickedness, but the folly, of unbelief, which is the marvel.

The contrast between the heavy price at which men buy hunger, and the easy rate at which they may have full satisfaction, is further set forth by the call to 'incline the ear,' which is all that is needed in order that life and nourishment which delights the soul may be ours. 'Hearken, and eat' is equivalent to 'Hearken, and ye shall eat.' The real 'good' for man is only to be found in listening to and obeying the divine voice, whether it sound in invitation, promise, or command. The true life of the soul lies in that listening receptiveness which takes for one's own God's great gift of Christ, and yields glad obedience to His every word.

The exiled Israel was promised an 'everlasting covenant' as the result of their acceptance of the invitation; and we know whose blood it is that has sealed the new covenant, which abides as long as Christ's fulness and men's need shall last. That covenant, of which we seldom hear in Isaiah, but which fills a prominent place in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is further explained as being 'the sure mercies of David.' This phrase and its context are difficult, but the general meaning is clear. The great promises of God's unfailing mercy, made to the historical founder of the royal house, shall be transferred and continued, with inviolable faithfulness, to those who drink of the gift of God.

This parallel between the great King and the whole mass of the true Israel is further set forth in verses 4 and 5. Each begins with 'Behold,' and the similar form indicates similarity in contents. The son of Jesse was in some degree God's witness to the heathen nations, as is expressed in several psalms; and, what he

was imperfectly, the ransomed Israel would be to the world. The office of the Christian Church is to draw nations that it knew not, to follow in the blessed path, in which it has found satisfaction and the dawnings of a more than natural glory transfiguring it. They who have themselves drunk of the unfailing fountain in Christ are thereby fitted and called to cry to others, 'Come ye to the waters.' Experience of Christ's preciousness, and of the rest of soul which comes from partaking of His salvation, impels and obliges to call others to share the bliss.

II. The second part of the chapter begins with an urgent call to repentance, based upon the difference between God's ways and man's, and on the certainty that the divine promises will be fulfilled. The summons in verses 6 and 7 is first couched in most general terms, which are then more closely defined. To 'seek the Lord' is to direct conduct and heart to obtain possession of God as one's own. Of that seeking, the chief element is calling upon Him; since such is His desire to be found of us that it only needs our asking in order to receive. As surely as the mother hears her child's cry, so surely does He catch the faintest voice addressed to Him. But, men being what they are, a change of ways and of their root in thoughts is indispensable. Seeking which is not accompanied by forsaking self and an evil past is no genuine seeking, and will end in no finding. But this forsaking is only one side of true repentance; the other is return to God, as is expressed in the New Testament word for it, which implies a change of mind, purpose, and conduct. The faces which were turned earthward and averted from God are to be turned Godward and diverted from earth. Whosoever thus seeks

may be confident of finding and of abundant pardon. The belief in God's loving forgivingness is the strongest motive to repentance, and the most melting argument to listen to the call to seek Him. But there is another motive of a more awful kind; namely, the consideration that the period of mercy is limited, and that a time may come, and that soon, when God no longer 'may be found' nor 'is near.'

The need for such a radical change in conduct and mind is further enforced, in verses 8 and 9, by the emphatic statement of present discord between the exiled Israel and God. Mark that the deepest seat of the discord is first dealt with, and then the manifestation of it in active life. Mark also that the order of comparison is inverted in the two successive clauses in verse 8. God's thoughts have not entered into Israel's mind and become theirs. The 'thinkings' not being regulated according to God's truth, nor the desires and sentiments brought into accord with His will and mind, a contrariety of 'ways' must follow, and the paths which men choose for themselves cannot run parallel with God's, nor be pleasing to Him. Therefore the stringent urgency of the call to forsake 'the crooked, wandering ways in which we live,' and to come back to the path of righteousness which is traced by God for our feet.

But divergence which necessitates repentance is not the only relation between our ways and God's. There is elevation, transcendency, like that of the eternal heavens, high, boundless, the home of light, the storehouse of beneficent influences which fertilise. If we think of the dreary, flat plains where the exiles were, and the magnificent sweep of the sky over them, we shall feel the beauty of the figure. If 'My thoughts are

not your thoughts' was all that was to be said, repentance would be of little use, and there would be little to encourage to it; but if God's thoughts of love and ways of blessing arch themselves above our low lives as the sky bends, pitying and bestowing, above squalor, barrenness, and darkness, then penitence is not in vain, and the low earth may be visited with gifts from the highest heaven.

The certainty that such gifts will be bestowed is the last thought of this magnificent summons. The prophet dilates on that assurance to the end of the chapter. He seems to catch fire, as it were, from the introduction of that grand figure of the lofty heavens domed above the flat earth. In effect, what he says is: They are high and inaccessible, but think what pours down from them, and how all fertility depends on their gifts of rain and snow, and how the moisture which they drop is turned into 'seed to the sower, and bread to the eater.' Thinking of that continuous benefaction and miracle, we should see in it a symbol of the better gifts from the higher heavens. So does God's word come down from His throne. So does it turn barrenness into nodding harvest. So does it quicken undreamed-of powers of fruitfulness in human nature and among the forces of the world. So does it supply nourishment for hungry souls, and germs which shall bear fruit in coming years. No complicated machinery nor the most careful culture can work what the gentle dropping rain effects. There is mightier force in it than in many thunder-clouds. The gospel does with ease and in silence what nothing else can do. It makes barren souls fruitful in all good works, and in all happiness worthy of men. Therefore the summons to drink of the springing fountain and to

turn from evil ways and thoughts is recommended by the assurance that God's word is faithful, and all His promises firm.

The final verses (verses 12, 13) give the glowing picture of the return from exile amid the jubilation of a transformed world, as the strongest motive to the obedient hearkening to God's voice, to which the chapter has summoned, and as the great instance of God's keeping His word.

The flight from Egypt was 'in haste' (Deut. xvi. 3); but this shall be a triumphal exodus, without conflict or alarms. All nature shall participate in the joy. Mountains and hills shall raise the shrill note of rejoicing, and the trees wave their branches, as if clapping hands in delight. This is more than mere poetic rhetoric. A redeemed humanity implies a glorified world. Nature has been involved in the consequences of sin, and will share in the results of redemption, and have some humble reflected light from 'the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.'

The fulfilment of this final promise is not yet. All earlier returns of the exiled Israel from the Babylon of their bondage to God and the city of God, such as the historical one which the prophet foretold, and the spiritual one which is repeated age by age in the history of the Christian Church and of single penitent souls, point on to that last triumphant day when 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return,' and the world be transfigured to match the glory that they inherit. That fair world without poison or offence, and the nations of the saved who inhabit its peaceful spaces, shall be, in the fullest stretch of the words, 'to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.' The re-

demption of man and his establishing amid the felicities of a state correspondent to His God-given glory shall be to all eternity and to all possible creations the highest evidence of what God is, and His token to all beings.

THE GREAT PROCLAMATION

'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.'—ISAIAH lv. 1.

THE meaning of the word *preach* is 'proclaim like a herald'; or, what is perhaps more familiar to most of us, like a town-crier; with a loud voice, clearly and plainly delivering the message. Now, there are other notions of a sermon than that; and there is other work which ministers have to do, of an educational kind. But my business now is to preach. We have ventured to ask others than the members of our own congregation to join us in this service; and I should be ashamed of myself, and have good reason to be so, if I had asked you to come to hear me talk, or to entertain you with more or less eloquent and thoughtful discourses. There is a time for everything; and what this is the time for is to ring out like a bellman the message which I believe God has given me for you. It cannot but suffer in passing through human lips; but I pray that my poor words may not be all unworthy of its stringency, and of the greatness of its blessing. My text is God's proclamation, and all that the best of us can do is but to reiterate that, more feebly alas, but still earnestly.

Suppose there was an advertisement in to-morrow morning's papers that any one that liked to go to a cer-

tain place might get a fortune for going, what a *queue* of waiting suppliants there would be at the door! Here is God's greatest gift going a-begging; and there are no doubt some among you who listen to my text with only the thought, 'Oh, the old threadbare story is what we have been asked to come and hear!' Brethren, have you taken the offer? If not, it needs to be pressed upon you once more. So my purpose in this sermon is a very simple one. I wish, as a brother to a brother, to put before you these three things: to whom this offer is made; what it consists of; and how it may be ours.

I. To whom this offer is made.

It is to every one thirsty and penniless. That is a melancholy combination, to be needing something infinitely, and to have not a farthing to get it with. But that is the condition in which we all stand, in regard to the highest and best things. This invitation of my text is as universal as if it had stopped with its third word. 'Ho, every one' would have been no broader than is the offer as it stands. For the characteristics named are those which belong, necessarily and universally, to human experience. If my text had said, 'Ho, every one that breathes human breath,' it would not have more completely covered the whole race, and enfolded thee and me, and all our brethren, in the amplitude of its promise, than it does when it sets up as the sole qualifications thirst and penury—that we infinitely need, and that we are absolutely unable to acquire, the blessings that it offers.

'Every one that thirsteth'—that means desire. Yes; but it means need also. And what is every man but a great bundle of yearnings and necessities? None of us carry within ourselves that which suffices for ourselves.

We are all dependent upon external things for being and for wellbeing.

There are thirsts which infallibly point to their true objects. If a man is hungry he knows that it is food that he wants. And just as the necessities of the animal life are incapable of being misunderstood, and the objects which will satisfy them incapable of being confused or mistaken, so there are other nobler thirsts, which, in like manner, work automatically, and point to the thing that they need. We have social instincts; we need love; we need friendship; we need somebody to lean upon; we thirst for some heart to rest our heads upon, for hands to clasp ours; and we know where the creatures and the objects are that will satisfy these desires. And there are the higher thirsts of the spirit, that 'follows knowledge, like a sinking star, beyond the furthest bounds of human thought'; and a man knows where and how to gratify the impulse that drives him to seek after the many forms of knowledge and wisdom.

But besides all these, besides sense, besides affection, besides emotions, besides the intellectual spur of which we are all more or less conscious, there come in a whole set of other thirsts that do not in themselves carry the intimation of the place where they can be slaked. And so you get men restless, as some of you are; always dissatisfied, as some of you are; feeling that there is something wanting, yet not knowing what, as some of you are. You remember the old story in the *Arabian Nights*, of the man who had a grand palace, and lived in it quite contentedly, until some one told him that it needed a roc's egg hanging from the roof to make it complete, and he did not know where to get that, and was miserable accordingly. We build our houses, we

fancy that we are satisfied; and then there comes the stinging thought that it is not all complete yet, and we go groping, groping in the dark, to find out where the lacking thing is. Shipwrecked sailors sometimes, in their desperation, drink salt water, and that makes them thirstier than ever, and brings on madness and death. Some publicans drug the vile liquors which they sell, so that they increase thirst. We may make no mistake about how to satisfy the desires of sense or of earthly affections; we may be quite certain that 'money answereth all things,' and that it is good to get on in business in Manchester; or may have found a pure and enduring satisfaction in study and in books—yet we have thirsts that some of us know not where to satisfy; and so we have parched lips and swollen tongues, and raging desire that earth can give nothing to fill.

My brother, do you know what it is that you want?

It is God. Nothing else, nothing less. 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.' The man that knows what it is of which he is in such sore need, is blessed. The man who only feels dimly that he needs something, and does not know that it is God whom he does need, is condemned to wander in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, and where his heart gapes, parched and cracked like the soil upon which he treads. Understand your thirst. Interpret your desires aright. Open your eyes to your need; and be sure of this, that mountains of money and the clearest insight into intellectual problems, and fame, and love, and wife, and children, and a happy home, and abundance of all things that you can desire, will leave a central aching emptiness that nothing and no person but God can ever fill. Oh, that we all knew what these yearnings of our hearts mean!

Aye! but there are *dormant* thirsts too. It is no proof of superiority that a savage has fewer wants than you and I have, for the want is the open mouth into which supply comes. And it is no proof that you have not, deep in your nature, desires which, unless they are satisfied, will prevent your being blessed, that these desires are all unconscious to yourselves. The business of us preachers is, very largely, to get the people who will listen to us, to recognise the fact that they do want things which they do not wish; and that, for the perfection of their natures, the cherishing of noble longings and thirstings is needful, and that to be without this sense of need is to be without one of the loftiest prerogatives of humanity.

Some of you do not wish forgiveness. Many of you would much rather not have holiness. You do not want to have God. The promises of the Gospel go clean over your heads, and are as impotent to influence you as the wind whistling through a keyhole, because you have never been aware of the wants to which these promises correspond, and do not understand what it is that you truly require.

And yet there is no desire—that is to say, consciousness of necessities—so dormant but that its being ungratified makes a man restless. You do not wish forgiveness, but you will never be happy till you get it. You do not wish to be good and true and holy men, but you will never be blessed till you are. You do not want to have God, some of you, but you will be restless till you find Him. You fancy you wish heaven when you are dead; you do not want it while you are living. But until your earthly life is like the life of Jesus Christ in heaven, though in an inferior degree, whilst it is on

earth, you will never be at rest. You are thirsty enough after these things to be ill at ease without them, when you bethink yourselves and pass out of the region of mere mechanical and habitual existence; but until you get these things that you do not desire, be sure of this: that you will be tortured with vain unrest, and will find that the satisfactions which you do seek turn to ashes in your mouth. 'Bread of deceit,' says the Book, 'is sweet to a man.' The writer meant by that that there were people to whom it was pleasant to tell profitable lies. But we might widen the meaning, and say that all these lower satisfactions, apart from the loftier ones of forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation with God, the conscious possession of Him, a well-grounded hope of immortality, the power to live a noble life and to look forward to a glorious heaven, are 'bread of deceit,' which promises nourishment and does not give it, but breaks the teeth that try to masticate it; 'it turneth to gravel.'

'Ho, every one that thirsteth.' That designation includes us all. 'And he that hath no money.' Who has any? Notice that the persons represented in our text as penniless are, in the next verse, remonstrated with for spending 'money.' So then the penniless man had some pence away in some corner of his pocket which he could spend. He had the money that would buy shams, 'that which is not bread' but a stone though it looks like a loaf, but he had no money for the true food. Which being translated out of parable into fact, is simply this, that our efforts may and do win for us the lower satisfactions which meet our transitory and superficial necessities, but that no effort of ours can secure for us the loftier blessings which slake the diviner thirsts of im-

mortal souls. A man lands in a far country with English shillings in his pocket, but he finds that no coins go there but thalers, or francs, or dollars, or the like; and his money is only current in his own land, and he must have it changed before he can make his purchases. So though he has a pocketful of it he may as well be penniless.

And, in like fashion, you and I, with all our strenuous efforts, which we are bound to make, and which there is joy in making, after these lower good things that correspond to our efforts, find that we have no coinage that will buy the good things of the kingdom of heaven, without which we faint and die. For them our efforts are useless. Can a man by his penitence, by his tears, by his amendment, make it possible for the consequences of his past to be obliterated, or all changed in their character into fatherly chastisement? No! A thousand times, no! The superficial notions of Christianity, which are only too common amongst both educated and uneducated, may say to a man, 'You need no divine intervention, if only you will get up from the dust, and do your best to keep up when you are up.' But those who realise more deeply what the significance of sin is, and what the eternal operation of its consequences upon the soul is, and what the awful majesty of a divine righteousness is, learn that the man who has sinned can, by nothing that he can do, obliterate that awful fact, or reduce it to insignificance, in regard to the divine relations to him. It is only God who can do that. We have no money.

So we stand thirsty and penniless—a desperate condition! Ay! brother, it *is* desperate, and it is the condition of every one of us. I wish I could turn the gener-

alities of my text into the individuality of a personal address. I wish I could bring its wide-flowing beneficence to a sharp point that might touch your conscience, heart, and will. I cannot do that; you must do it for yourself.

'Ho, every one that thirsteth.' Will you pause for a moment, and say to yourself, 'That is I'? 'And he that hath no money'—that is I. 'Come ye to the waters'—that is I. The proclamation is for thine ear and for thy heart; and the gift is for thy hand and thy lips.

II. In what this offer consists.

They tell an old story about the rejoicings at the coronation of some great king, when there was set up in the market-place a triple fountain, from each of whose three lips flowed a different kind of rare liquor which any man who chose to bring a pitcher might fill it with, at his choice. Notice my text, 'come ye to the *waters*' . . . 'buy *wine* and *milk*.' The great fountain is set up in the market-place of the world, and every man may come; and whichever of this glorious triad of effluents he needs most, there his lip may glue itself and there it may drink, be it 'water' that refreshes, or 'wine' that gladdens, or 'milk' that nourishes. They are all contained in this one great gift that flows out from the deep heart of God to the thirsty lips of parched humanity.

And what is that gift? Well, we may say, salvation; or we may use many other words to define the nature of the gifts. I venture to take a shorter one, and say, it means Christ. He, and not merely some truth about Him and His work; He Himself, in the fulness of His being, in the all-sufficiency of His love, in the reality of His presence, in the power of His sacrifice, in the daily

derivation, into the heart that waits upon Him, of His life and His spirit, He is the all-sufficient supply of every thirst of every human soul. Do we want happiness? Christ gives us His joy, abiding and full, and not as the world gives. Do we want love? He gathers us to His heart, in which 'there is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning,' and binds us to Himself by bonds that death, the separator, vainly attempts to untie, and which no unworthiness, ingratitude or coldness of ours will ever be able to unloose. Do we want wisdom? He will dwell with us as our light. Do our hearts yearn for companionship? With Him we shall never be solitary. Do we long for a bright hope which shall light up the dark future, and spread a rainbow span over the great gorge and gulf of death? Jesus Christ spans the void, and gives us unfailing and undeceiving hope. For everything that you and I need here or yonder, in heart, in will, in practical life, Jesus Christ Himself is the all-sufficient supply.

'My life in death, my all in all.' What is offered in Him may be described by all the glorious and blessed names which men have invented to designate the various aspects of the Good. These are the goodly pearls that men seek, but there is one of great price which is worth them all, and gathers into itself all their clouded and fragmentary splendours. Christ is all, and the soul that has Him shall never thirst.

'Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee.'

III. Lastly, how do we obtain the offered gifts?

The paradox of my text needs little explanation, 'Buy without money and without price.' The contradiction on the surface is but intended to make emphatic this

blessed truth, which I pray may reach your memories and hearts, that the only conditions are a sense of need, and a willingness to take—nothing less and nothing more. We must recognise our penury and must abandon self, and put away all ideas of having a finger in our own salvation, and be willing—which, strangely and sadly enough, many of us are not—to be under obligations to God's unhelped and undeserved love for all.

Cheap things are seldom valued. Ask a high price and people think that the commodity is precious. A man goes into a fair, for a wager, and he carries with him a tray full of gold watches and offers to sell them for a farthing apiece, and nobody will buy them. It does not, I hope, degrade the subject, if I say Jesus Christ comes into the market-place of the world with His hands full of the gifts which His pierced hands have bought, that He may give them away. He says, 'Will you take them?' And you, and you, and you, pass by on the other side, and go away to another merchant, and buy dearly things that are not worth the having.

'My father, my father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?' Would you not? Swing at the end of a pole, with hooks in your back; measure all the way from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, lying down on your face and rising at each length; do a hundred things which heathens and Roman Catholics and unspiritual Protestants think to be the way to get salvation; deny yourselves things that you would like to do; do things that you do not want to do; give money that you would like to keep; avoid habits that are very sweet, go to church or chapel when you have no heart for worship; and so try to balance the account. If the prophet had bid thee do some

great thing, thou wouldst have done it. How much rather when he says, 'Wash, and be clean.' 'Nothing in my heart I bring.' You do *not* bring anything. 'Simply to Thy Cross I cling.' Do you? Do you? Jesus Christ catches up the 'comes' of my text, and He says, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.' Brethren, I lay it on your hearts and consciences to answer Him—never mind about me—to answer *Him:* 'Sir, give me this water that I thirst not.'

GOD'S WAYS AND MAN'S

'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. 9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.' —ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

SCRIPTURE gives us no revelations concerning God merely in order that we may know about Him. These words are grand poetry and noble theology, but they are meant practically and in fiery earnestness. The 'for' at the beginning of each clause points us back to the previous statement, and both of the verses of our text are in different ways its foundation. And what has preceded is this: 'Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' That is why the prophet dilates upon the difference between the 'thoughts' and the 'ways' of God and of men.

If we look at these two verses a little more closely we shall perceive that they by no means cover the same ground nor suggest the same idea as to the relationship between God's 'ways' and 'thoughts' and ours. The

former of them speaks of unlikeness and opposition, the latter of elevation and superiority; the former of them is the basis of an indictment and an exhortation, the latter is the basis of an encouragement and a promise. The former of them is the reason why 'the wicked' and 'unrighteous man' ought to and must 'turn' from 'his ways' and 'thoughts,' the latter of them is the reason why, 'turning,' he may be sure that the Lord 'will abundantly pardon.'

And so we have here two things to consider in reference to the relation between the divine purposes and acts and man's purposes and acts. First, the antagonism, and the indictment and exhortation that are based upon that; second, the analogy but superiority, and the exhortation and hope that are built upon that. Let me deal, then, with these separately.

I. We have here an unlikeness declared, and upon that is rested an appeal.

Notice the remarkable order and alternation of pronouns in the first verse. '*My* thoughts are not *your* thoughts,' saith the Lord. The things that God thinks and purposes are not the things that man thinks and purposes, and therefore, because the thoughts are different, the outcomes of them in deeds are divergent. God's 'ways' are His acts, the manner and course of His working considered as a path on which He moves, and on which, in some sense, we can also journey. Our 'ways' —our manner of life—are not parallel with His, as they should be.

But that opposition is expressed with a remarkable variation. Observe the change of pronouns in the two clauses. First, '*My* thoughts are not your thoughts'—you have not taken My truth into your minds, nor My

purposes into your wills; you do not think God's thoughts. Therefore—'*your* ways (instead of 'My,' as we should have expected, to keep the regularity of the parallelism) are not My ways'—I repudiate and abjure your conduct and condemn it utterly.

Now, of course, in this charge of man's unlikeness to God, there is no contradiction of, nor reference to, man's natural constitution, in which there are, at one and the same time, the likeness of the child with the parent and the unlikeness between the creature and the Creator. If our thoughts were not in a measure like God's thoughts, we should know nothing about Him. If our thoughts were not like God's thoughts, we should have no standard for life or thinking. Righteousness and beauty and truth and goodness are the same things in heaven and earth, and alike in God and man. We are made after His image, poor creatures though we be; and though there must ever be a gulf of unlikeness, which we cannot bridge, between the thoughts of Him whose knowledge has no growth nor uncertainty, whose wisdom is infinite and all whose nature is boundless light, and our knowledge, and must ever be a gulf between the workings and ways of Him who works without effort, and knows neither weariness nor limitation, and our work, so often foiled, so always toilsome, yet in all the unlikeness there is (and no man can denude himself of it) a likeness to the Father. For the image in which God made man at the beginning is not an image that it is in the power of men to cast away, and in the worst of his corruptions and the widest of his departures he still bears upon him the signs of likeness 'to Him that created him.' The coin is rusty, battered, defaced; but still legible are the head and the writing. 'Whose

image and superscription hath it?' Render unto God the things that are declared to be God's, because they bear His likeness and are stamped with His signature.

But that very necessary and natural likeness between God and man makes more solemnly sinful the voluntary unlikeness which we have brought upon ourselves. If there were no analogy, there could be no contrast. If God and man were utterly unlike, then there would be no evil in our unlikeness and no need for our repentance.

The true state for each of us is that we should, as the great astronomer said he had done in regard to his own science, 'think God's thoughts after Him,' and have our minds filled with His truth and our wills all harmonised with His purposes, and that we should thus make our ways to run parallel with the ways of God. The blessedness, the peace, the true manhood of a man, are that his ways and thoughts should be like God's. And so my text comes with its indictment—You who by nature were formed in His image, you to whom it is open to sympathise with His designs, to harmonise your wills with His will, and to bring all the dark and crooked ways in which you walk into full parallelism with His way—you have departed into darkness of unlikeness, and in thought and in ways are the opposites of God.

Mark how wonderfully, in the simple language of my text, deep truths about this sin of ours are conveyed. Notice its growth and order. It begins with a heart and mind that do not take in God's thoughts, truths, purposes, desires, and then the alienated will and the darkened understanding and the conscience which has closed itself against His imperative voice issue afterwards in conduct which He cannot accept as in any way corresponding with His. First comes the thought unrecep-

tive of God's thought, and then follow ways contrary to God's ways.

Notice the profound truth here in regard to the essential and deepest evil of all our evil. '*Your* thoughts'; '*your* ways,'—self-dependence and self-confidence are the master-evils of humanity. And every sin is at bottom the result of saying—'I will not conform myself to God, but I am going to please myself, and take my own way.' My own way is never God's way; my own way is always the devil's way. And the root of all sin lies in these two strong, simple words, '*Your* thoughts not Mine; *your* ways not Mine.'

Notice, too, how there are suggested the misery and retribution of this unlikeness. 'If you will not make My thoughts your thoughts, I shall not take your ways as My ways. I will leave you to them.' 'You will be filled with the fruit of your own devices. I shall not incorporate your actions into My great scheme and purpose.' Men

> 'Would not know His ways,
> And He has left them to their own.'

So here we have the solemn indictment brought by God's own voice against us all. The criminality of our unlikeness to Him rests upon our original likeness.

The unlikeness roots itself in thought, and blossoms in the poisonous flower of God-displeasing acts. It brings down upon our heads the solemn retribution of separation from Him, and being filled with the fruit of our own devices. Such is the indictment brought against every soul of man upon the earth, and there is built upon it the call to repentance and change, 'let the wicked forsake his *way*, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*.' The question rises in many a heart, 'How

am I to forsake these paths on which my feet have so longed walked?' And if I do, what about all the years behind me, full of wild wanderings and thoughts in all of which God was not?

II. The second verse of our text meets that despairing question. It proclaims the elevation of God's ways and thoughts above ours, and thereon bases the assurance of pardon.

The relation is not only one of unlikeness and opposition, but it is also one of analogy and superiority. The former clause began with thoughts which are the parents of ways, and, as befits the all-seeing Judge, laid bare first the hidden discord of man's heart and will, ere it pointed to the manifest antagonism of his doings. This clause begins with God's ways, from which alone men can reach the knowledge of His thoughts. The first follows the order of God's knowledge of man; the second, that of man's knowledge of God.

It is a wonderful and beautiful turn which the prophet here gives to the thought of the transcendent elevation of God. The heavens are the very type of the unattainable; and to say that they are 'higher than the earth' seems, at first sight, to be but to say, 'No man hath ascended into the heavens,' and you sinful men must grovel here down upon your plain, whilst they are far above, out of your reach. But the heavens bend. They are an arch, and not a straight line. They touch the horizon; and there come from them the sweet influences of sunshine and of rain, of dew and of blessing, which bring fertility. So they are not only far and unattainable, but friendly and beneficent, and communicative of good. Like them, in true analogy but yet infinite

superiority to the best and noblest in man, is the boundless mercy of our pardoning God:

> 'The glorious sky, embracing all,
> Is like its Maker's love,
> Wherewith encompassed, great and small
> In peace and order move.'

'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways.' *The* special 'thought' and 'way' which is meant here is God's thought and way about sin. There are three points here on which I would touch for a moment. First, God's way of dealing with sin is lifted up above all human example. There is such a thing as pardoning mercy amongst men. It is a faint analogy of, as it is an offshoot from, the divine pardon, but all the forgivingness of the most placable and long-suffering and gladly pardoning of men is but as earth to heaven compared with the greatness of His. Our forgiveness has its limitations. We sometimes cannot pardon as freely as we thought, because there blends with our indignation against evil a passionate personal sense of wrong done to us which we cannot get rid of, and that disturbs the freeness and the joyfulness of many a human pardon. But God's pardon is undisturbed and hindered by any sense of personal resentment, though sin is an offense against Him, and in its freeness, its fulness, its frequency, and its sovereign power to melt away that which it forgives, it towers above the loftiest of earth's beauties of forgiveness, as the starry heavens do above the flat plain.

God's pardon is above all human example, even though, having once been received by us, it ought to become for us the pattern by which we shape and regulate our own lives. Nothing of which we have any experience in ourselves or in others is more than as a drop

to the ocean compared with the absolute fulness and perfect freeness and unwearied frequency of His forgiveness. 'He will abundantly pardon.' He will multiply pardon. 'With Him there is plenteous redemption.' We think we have stretched the elasticity of long suffering and forgiveness further than we might have been reasonably expected to do if seven times we forgive the erring brother, but God's measure of pardon is seventy times seven, two perfectnesses multiplied into themselves perfectly; for the measure of His forgiveness is boundless, and there is no searching of the depths of His pardoning mercy. You cannot weary Him out, you cannot exhaust it. It is full at the end as at the beginning; and after all its gifts still it remains true, 'With Him is the multiplying of redemption.'

Again, God's way of dealing with sin surpasses all our thought. All religion has been pressed with this problem, how to harmonise the perfect rectitude of the divine nature and the solemn claims of law with forgiveness. All religions have borne witness to the fact that men are dimly aware of the discord and dissonance between themselves and the divine thoughts and ways; and a thousand altars proclaim to us how they have felt that something must be done in order that forgiveness might be possible to an all-righteous and Sovereign Judge. The Jew knew that God was a pardoning God, but to him that fact stood as needing much explanation and much light to be thrown upon its relations with the solemn law under which he lived. We have Jesus Christ. The mystery of forgiveness is solved, in so far as it is capable of solution, in Him and in Him alone. His death somewhat explains how God is just and the Justifier of him that believeth. High above man's

thoughts this great central mystery of the Gospel rises, that with God there is forgiveness and with God there is perfect righteousness. The Cross as the basis of pardon is the central mystery of revelation; and it is not to be expected that our theories shall be able to sound the depths of that great act of the divine love. Perhaps our plummets do not go to the bottom of the bottomless after all; but is it needful that we should have gone to the rim of the heavens, and round about it on the outside, before we rejoice in the sunshine? Is it needful that we should have traversed the abysses of the heavens, and passed from star to star and told their numbers, before we can say that they are bright, or before we can walk in their light? We do not need to understand the 'how' in order to be sure of the fact that Christ's death is our forgiveness. Do not be in such a hurry as some people are nowadays, to declare that the doctrine of the Cross is contrary to man's conceptions. It *surpasses* them, and the very fact that it surpasses ought to stop us from pronouncing that it *contradicts*. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts.'

Lastly, we are taught here that God's way of dealing with sin is the very highest point of His self-revelation. There are many glories of the divine nature set forth in all His ways, but the loftiest of them all is this, that He can neutralise and destroy the fact of man's transgressing, wiping it out by pardon; and in the very act of pardon reconstituting in purity, and with a heart for all holiness, the sinful men whom He forgives. This is the shining apex of all that He has done, rising above creation and every other 'way' of His, as high as the loftiest heavens are above the earth.

Therefore, have a care of all forms of Christianity which do not put God's pardoning mercy in the foreground. They are maimed, and in them mist and cloud have covered with a roof of doleful grey the low-lying earth, and separated it from the highest heavens. The true glory of the revelation of God gathers round that central Cross; and there, in that Man dying upon it in the dark—the sacrifice for a world's sin—is the loftiest, most heavenly revelation of the all-revealing God. Strike out the Cross from Christianity, or weaken its aspect as a message of forgiveness and redemption, and you have quenched its brightest light, and dragged it down to be but a little higher, if any, than many another scheme of other moralists, philosophers, poets, and religious teachers. The distinctive glory of Christianity is this—it tells us how God sweeps away sin.

And so my last thought is that, if we desire to see up on the highest heavens of God's character, we must go down into the depths of the consciousness of our own sin, and learn first, how unlike our ways and thoughts are to God, ere we can understand how high above us, and yet beneficently arching over us, are His ways and thoughts to us. We lie beneath the heavens like some foul bog full of black ooze, rotten earth and putrid water, where there is nothing green or fair. But the promise of the bending heavens, with their sweet influences, declares the possibility of reclaiming even that waste, and making it rejoice and blossom as the rose. Spread yourselves out, dear friends, in lowly submission and penitent acknowledgment beneath the all-vivifying mercy of that shining heaven of God's pardon; and then the old promise will be fulfilled in you: 'Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall

look down from heaven; yea, the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land'—barren and poisoned as it has been—responding to the skyey influences, 'shall yield her increase.'

ARE WE SURE OF TO-MORROW?

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON

'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'—ISAIAH lvi. 12.

THESE words, as they stand, are the call of boon companions to new revelry. They are part of the prophet's picture of a corrupt age when the men of influence and position had thrown away their sense of duty, and had given themselves over, as aristocracies and plutocracies are ever tempted to do, to mere luxury and good living. They are summoning one another to their coarse orgies. The roystering speaker says, 'Do not be afraid to drink; the cellar will hold out. To-day's carouse will not empty it; there will be enough for to-morrow.' He forgets to-morrow's headaches; he forgets that on some to-morrow the wine will be finished; he forgets that the fingers of a hand may write the doom of the rioters on the very walls of the banqueting chamber.

What have such words, the very motto of insolent presumption and short-sighted animalism, to do with New Year's thoughts? Only this, that base and foolish as they are on such lips, it is possible to lift them from the mud, and take them as the utterance of a lofty and calm hope which will not be disappointed, and of a firm and lowly resolve which may ennoble life. Like a great many other sayings, they may fit the mouth either of a sot or of a saint. All depends on what the things are which we are thinking about when we use them. There

are things about which it is absurd and worse than absurd to say this, and there are things about which it is the soberest truth to say it. So looking forward into the merciful darkness of another year, we may regard these words as either the expressions of hopes which it is folly to cherish, or of hopes that it is reasonable to entertain.

I. This expectation, if directed to any outward things, is an illusion and a dream.

These coarse revellers into whose lips our text is put only meant by it to brave the future and defy to-morrow in the riot of their drunkenness. They show us the vulgarest, lowest form which the expectation can take, a form which I need say nothing about now.

But I may just note in passing that to look forward principally as anticipating pleasure or enjoyment is a very poor and unworthy thing. We weaken and lower every day, if we use our faculty of hope mainly to paint the future as a scene of delights and satisfactions. We spoil to-day by thinking how we can turn it to the account of pleasure. We spoil to-morrow before it comes, and hurt ourselves, if we are more engaged with fancying how it will minister to our joy, than how we can make it minister to our duty. It is base and foolish to be forecasting our pleasures; the true temper is to be forecasting our work.

But, leaving that consideration, let us notice how useless such anticipation, and how mad such confidence, as that expressed in the text is, if directed to anything short of God.

We are so constituted as that we grow into a persuasion that what has been will be, and yet we can give no sufficient reason to ourselves of why we expect it. 'The uniformity of the course of nature is the corner-stone,

not only of physical science, but, in a more homely form, of the wisdom which grows with experience. We all believe that the sun will rise to-morrow because it rose to-day, and on all the yesterdays. But there was a to-day which had no yesterday, and there will be a to-day which will have no to-morrow. The sun will rise for the last time. The uniformity had a beginning and will have an end.

So, even as an axiom of thought, the anticipation that things will continue as they have been because they have been, seems to rest on an insufficient basis. How much more so, as to our own little lives and their surroundings! There the only thing which we may be quite sure of about to-morrow is that it will not be 'as this day.' Even for those of us who may have reached, for example, the level plateau of middle life, where our position and tasks are pretty well fixed, and we have little more to expect than the monotonous repetition of the same duties recurring at the same hour every day—even for such each day has its own distinctive character. Like a flock of sheep they seem all alike, but each, on closer inspection, reveals a physiognomy of its own. There will be so many small changes that even the same duties or enjoyments will not be quite the same, and even if the outward things remained absolutely unaltered, we who meet them are not the same. Little variations in mood and tone, diminished zest here, weakened power there, other thoughts breaking in, and over and above all the slow, silent change wrought on us by growing years, make the perfect reproduction of any past impossible. So, however familiar may be the road which we have to traverse, however uneventfully the same our days may sometimes for long spaces in our lives seem to be,

though to ourselves often our day's work may appear as a mill-horse round, yet in deepest truth, if we take into account the whole sum of the minute changes in it and in us, it may be said of each step of our journey, 'Ye have not passed this way heretofore.'

But, besides all this, we know that these breathing-times when 'we have no changes,' are but pauses in the storm, landing-places in the ascent, the interspaces between the shocks. However hope may tempt us to dream that the future is like the present, a deeper wisdom lies in all our souls which says 'No.' Drunken bravery may front that darkness with such words as these of our text, but the least serious spirit, in its most joyous moods, never quite succeeds in forgetting the solemn probabilities, possibilities, and certainties which lodge in the unknown future. So to a wise man it is ever a sobering exercise to look forward, and we shall be nearest the truth if we take due account, as we do to-day, of the undoubted fact that the only thing certain about to-morrow is that it will not be as this day.

There are the great changes which come to some one every day, which may come to any of us any day, which will come to all of us some day. Some of us will die this year; on a day in our new diaries some of us will make no entry, for we shall be gone. Some of us will be smitten down by illness; some of us will lose our dearest; some of us will lose fortune. Which of us it is to be, and where within these twelve months the blow is to fall, are mercifully hidden. The only thing that we certainly know is that these arrows will fly. The thing we do not know is whose heart they will pierce. This makes the gaze into the darkness grave and solemn. There is ever something of dread in Hope's blue eyes.

True, the ministry of change is blessed and helpful; true, the darkness which hides the future is merciful and needful, if the present is not to be marred. But helpful and merciful as they are, they invest the unknown to-morrow with a solemn power which it is good, though sobering, for us to feel, and they silence on every lip but that of riot and foolhardy debauchery the presumptuous words, 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

II. But yet there is a possibility of so using the words as to make them the utterance of a sober certainty which will not be put to shame.

So long as our hope and anticipations creep along the low levels of earth, and are concerned with external and creatural good, their language can never rise beyond, 'To-morrow *may* be as this day.' Oftenest they reach only to the height of the wistful wish, 'May it be as this day!' But there is no need for our being tortured with such slippery possibilities. We may send out our hope like Noah's dove, not to hover restlessly over a heaving ocean of change, but to light on firm, solid certainty, and fold its wearied wings there. Forecasting is ever close by foreboding. Hope is interwoven with fear, the golden threads of the weft crossing the dark ones of the warp, and the whole texture gleaming bright or glooming black according to the angle at which it is seen. So is it always until we turn our hope away from earth to God, and fill the future with the light of His presence and the certainty of His truth. Then the mists and doubts roll away; we get above the region of 'perhaps' into that of 'surely'; the future is as certain as the past, hope as assured of its facts as memory, prophecy as veracious as history.

Looking forward, then, let us not occupy ourselves with visions which we know may or may not come true. Let us not feed ourselves with illusions which may make the reality, when it comes to shatter them, yet harder to bear. But let us make God in Christ our hope, and pass from peradventures to certitudes; from 'To-morrow may be as this day—would that it might,' to 'It shall be, it shall be, for God is my expectation and my hope.' We have an unchanging and an inexhaustible God, and He is the true guarantee of the future for us. The more we accustom ourselves to think of Him as shaping all that is contingent and changeful in the nearest and in the remotest to-morrow, and as being Himself the immutable portion of our souls, the calmer will be our outlook into the darkness, and the more bright will be the clear light of certainty which burns for us in it.

To-day's wealth may be to-morrow's poverty, to-day's health to-morrow's sickness, to-day's happy companionship of love to-morrow's aching solitude of heart, but to-day's God will be to-morrow's God, to-day's Christ will be to-morrow's Christ. Other fountains may dry up in heat or freeze in winter, but this knows no change, 'in summer and winter it shall be.' Other fountains may sink low in their basins after much drawing, but this is ever full, and after a thousand generations have drawn from it, its stream is broad and deep as ever. Other springs may be left behind on the march, and the wells and palm-trees of each Elim on our road may be succeeded by a dry and thirsty land where no water is, but this spring follows us all through the wilderness, and makes music and spreads freshness ever by our path. We can forecast nothing beside; we can be sure of this, that God will be with us in all the days that lie

before us. What may be round the next headland we know not; but this we know, that the same sunshine will make a broadening path across the waters right to where we rock on the unknown sea, and the same unmoving mighty star will burn for our guidance. So we may let the waves and currents roll as they list—or rather as He wills, and be little concerned about the incidents or the companions of our voyage, since He is with us. We can front the unknown to-morrow, even when we most keenly feel how solemn and sad are the things it may bring.

> 'It can bring with it nothing
> But He will bear us through.'

If only our hearts be fixed on God and we are feeding our minds and wills on Him, His truth and His will, then we may be quite certain that, whatever goes, our truest riches will abide, and whoever leaves our little company of loved ones, our best Friend will not go away. Therefore, lifting our hopes beyond the low levels of earth, and making our anticipations of the future the reflection of the brightness of God thrown on that else blank curtain, we may turn into the worthy utterance of sober and saintly faith, the folly of the riotous sensualist when he said, 'To-morrow shall be as this day.'

The past is the mirror of the future for the Christian; we look back on all the great deeds of old by which God has redeemed and helped souls that cried to Him, and we find in them the eternal laws of His working. They are all true for to-day as they were at first; they remain true forever. The whole history of the past belongs to us, and avails for our present and for our future. 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God.'

To-day's experience runs on the same lines as the stories of the 'years of old,' which are 'the years of the right hand of the Most High.' Experience is ever the parent of hope, and the latter can only build with the bricks which the former gives. So the Christian has to lay hold on all that God's mercy has done in the ages that are gone by, and because He is a 'faithful Creator' to transmute history into prophecy, and triumph in that 'the God of Jacob is our refuge.'

Nor only does the record of what He has been to others come in to bring material for our forecast of the future, but also the remembrance of what He has been to ourselves. Has He been with us in six troubles? We may be sure He will not abandon us at the seventh. He is not in the way of beginning to build and leaving His work unfinished. Remember what He has been to you, and rejoice that there has been one thing in your lives which, you may be sure, will always be there. Feed your certain hopes for to-morrow on thankful remembrances of many a yesterday. 'Forget not the works of God,' that you may 'set your hopes on God.' Let our anticipations base themselves on memory, and utter themselves in the prayer, 'Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.' Then the assurance that He whom we know to be good and wise and strong will shape the future, and Himself be the Future for us, will take all the fear out of that forward gaze, will condense our light and unsubstantial hopes into solid realities, and set before us an endless line of days, in each of which we may gain more of Him whose face has brightened the past and will brighten the future, till days shall end and time open into eternity.

III. Looked at in another aspect, these words may be taken as the vow of a firm and lowly resolve.

There is a future which we can but very slightly influence, and the less we look at that the better every way. But there is also a future which we can mould as we wish—the future of our own characters, the only future which is really ours at all—and the more clearly we set it before ourselves and make up our minds as to whither we wish it to be tending, the better. In that region, it is eminently true that 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' The law of continuity shapes our moral and spiritual characters. What I am to-day, I shall increasingly be to-morrow. The awful power of habit solidifies actions into customs, and prolongs the reverberation of every note once sounded, along the vaulted roof of the chamber where we live. To-day is the child of yesterday and the parent of to-morrow.

That solemn certainty of the continuance and increase of moral and spiritual characteristics works in both good and bad, but with a difference. To secure its full blessing in the gradual development of the germs of good, there must be constant effort and tenacious resolution. So many foes beset the springing of the good seed in our hearts—what with the flying flocks of light-winged fugitive thoughts ever ready to swoop down as soon as the sower's back is turned and snatch it away, what with the hardness of the rock which the roots soon encounter, what with the thick-sown and quick-springing thorns—that if we trust to the natural laws of growth and neglect careful husbandry, we may sow much but we shall gather little. But to inherit the full consequences of that same law working in the growth and development of the evil in us, nothing is needed but carelessness.

Leave it alone for a year or two and the 'fruitful field will be a forest,' a jungle of matted weeds, with a straggling blossom where cultivation had once been.

But if humbly we resolve and earnestly toil, looking for His help, we may venture to hope that our characters will grow in goodness and in likeness to our dear Lord, that we shall not cast away our confidence nor make shipwreck of our faith, that each new day shall find in us a deeper love, a perfecter consecration, a more joyful service, and that so, in all the beauties of the Christian soul and in all the blessings of the Christian life, 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' 'To him that hath shall be given.' 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more until the noontide of the day.'

So we may look forward undismayed, and while we recognise the darkness that wraps to-morrow in regard to all mundane affairs, may feed our fortitude and fasten our confidence on the double certainties that we shall have God and more of God for our treasure, that we shall have likeness to Him and more of likeness in our characters. Fleeting moments may come and go. The uncertain days may exercise their various ministry of giving and taking away, but whether they plant or root up our earthly props, whether they build or destroy our earthly houses, they will increase our riches in the heavens, and give us fuller possession of deeper draughts from the inexhaustible fountain of living waters.

How dreadfully that same law of the continuity and development of character works in some men there is no need now to dwell upon. By slow, imperceptible, certain degrees the evil gains upon them. Yesterday's sin smooths the path for to-day's. The temptation once

yielded to gains power. The crack in the embankment which lets a drop or two ooze through is soon a great hole which lets in a flood. It is easier to find a man who has never done a wrong thing than to find a man who has done it only once. Peter denied his Lord thrice, and each time more easily than the previous time. So, before we know it, the thin gossamer threads of single actions are twisted into a rope of habit, and we are 'tied with the cords of our sins.' Let no man say, 'Just for once I may venture on evil; so far I will go and no farther.' Nay, 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

How important, then, the smallest acts become when we think of them as thus influencing character! The microscopic creatures, thousands of which will go into a square inch, make the great white cliffs that beetle over the wildest sea and front the storm. So, permanent and solid character is built up out of trivial actions, and this is the solemn aspect of our passing days, that they are making *us*.

We might well tremble before such a thought, which would be dreadful to the best of us, if it were not for pardoning mercy and renewing grace. The law of reaping what we have sown, or of continuing as we have begun, may be modified as far as our sins and failures are concerned. The entail may be cut off, and to-morrow need not inherit to-day's guilt, nor to-day's habits. The past may be all blotted out through the mercy of God in Christ. No debt need be carried forward to another page of the book of our lives, for Christ has given Himself for us, and He speaks to us all—'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' No evil habit need continue its dominion over us, nor are we obliged to carry on the bad tradition

of wrongdoing into a future day, for Christ lives, and 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things are become new.'

So then, brethren, let us humbly take the confidence which these words may be used to express, and as we stand on the threshold of a new year and wait for the curtain to be drawn, let us print deep on our hearts the uncertainty of our hold of all things here, nor seek to build nor anchor on these, but lift our thoughts to Him, who will bless the future as He has blessed the past, and will even enlarge the gifts of His love and the help of His right hand. Let us hope for ourselves not the continuance or increase of outward good, but the growth of our souls in all things lovely and of good report, the daily advance in the love and likeness of our Lord.

So each day, each succeeding wave of the ocean of time shall cast up treasures for us as it breaks at our feet. As we grow in years, we shall grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, until the day comes when we shall exchange earth for heaven. That will be the sublimest application of this text, when, dying, we can calmly be sure that though to-day be on this side and to-morrow on the other bank of the black river, there will be no break in the continuity, but only an infinite growth in our life, and heaven's to-morrow shall be as earth's to-day, and much more abundant.

FLIMSY GARMENTS

'Their webs shall not become garments.'—ISAIAH lix. 6.
'I counsel thee to buy of me . . . white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.'—REV. iii. 18.

THE force of these words of the prophet is very obvious. He has been pouring out swift, indignant denunciation on the evil-doers in Israel; and, says he, 'they hatch cockatrice's eggs and spin spiders' webs,' pointing, as I suppose, to the patient perseverance, worthy of a better cause, which bad men will exercise in working out their plans. Then with a flash of bitter irony, led on by his imagination to say more than he had meant, he adds this scathing parenthesis, as if he said, 'Yes, they spin spiders' webs, elaborate toil and creeping contrivance, and what comes of it all! The flimsy foul thing is swept away by God's besom sooner or later. A web indeed! but they will never make a garment out of it. It looks like cloth, but it is useless.' That is the old lesson that all sin is profitless and comes to nothing.

I venture to connect with that strongly figurative declaration of the essential futility of godless living, our second text, in which Jesus uses a similar figure to express one aspect of His gifts to the believing soul. He is ready to clothe it, so that 'being clothed, it will not be found naked.'

I. Sin clothes no man even here.

Notice in passing what a hint there is of the toil and trouble that men are so willing to take in a wrong course. Hatching and spinning both suggest protracted, sedulous labour. And then the issue of it all is—*nothing*.

Take the plainest illustrations of this truth first—the breach of common laws of morality, the indulgence, for

instance, in dissipation. A man gets a certain coarse delight out of it, but what does he get besides? A weakened body, a tyrannous craving, ruined prospects, oftenest poverty and shame, the loss of self-respect and love; of moral excellences, of tastes for what is better. He is not a beast, and he cannot live for pure animalism without injuring himself.

Then take actual breaches of human laws. How seldom these 'pay,' even in the lowest sense. Thieves are always poor. The same experience of futility dogs all coarse and palpable breaches of morality. It is always true that 'He that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.'

The reasons are not far to seek. This is, on the whole, God's world, a world of retribution. Things are, on the whole, on the side of goodness. God is in the world, and that is an element not to be left out in the calculation. Society is on the side of goodness to a large extent. The constitution of a man's own soul, which God made, works in the same direction. Young men who are trembling on the verge of youthful yieldings to passion, are tempted to fancy that they can sow sin and not reap suffering or harm. Would that they settled it in their thoughts that he who fires a fuse must expect an explosion!

But the same rule applies to every godless form of life. Take our Manchester temptation, money or success in business. Take ambition. Take culture, literary fame. Take love and friendship. What do they all come to, if godless? I do not point to the many failures, but suppose success: would that make you a happy man? If you won what you wanted, would it be enough? What 'garments' for your conscience, for your sense of sin,

for your infinite longings would success in any godless course provide? You would have what you wanted, and what would it bring with it? Cares and troubles and swift satiety, and not seldom incapacity to enjoy what you had won with so much toil. If you gained the prize, you would find clinging to it something that you did not bargain for, and that took most of the dazzle away from it.

II. The rags are all stripped off some day.

Death is a becoming naked as to the body, and as to all the occupations that terminate with bodily life. It necessarily involves the loss of possessions, the cessation of activities, the stripping off of self-deceptions, and exposure to the gaze of the Judge, without defence. The godless soul will 'be found naked' and ashamed. All 'works of darkness,' laden with rich blossom or juicy fruit though they have seemed to be, will then be seen to be in tragic truth 'fruitless.' A life's spinning and weaving, and not a rag to cover the toiler after all! Is that 'productive labour'?

III. Christ will clothe you.

'White raiment.' Pure character. Covering before the Judge. Festal robe of Victory.

'Buy'—how? By giving up self.

THE SUNLIT CHURCH

'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. 2. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. 3. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.'—ISAIAH lx. 1–3.

THE personation of Israel as a woman runs through the whole of this second portion of Isaiah's prophecy. We see her thrown on the earth a mourning mother, a

shackled captive. We hear her summoned once and again to awake, to arise, to shake herself from the dust, to loose the bands of her neck. These summonses are prophecies of the impending Messianic deliverance. The same circle of truths, in a somewhat different aspect, is presented in the verses before us. The prophet sees the earth wrapped in a funeral pall of darkness, and a beam of more than natural light falling on one prostrate form. The old story is repeated, Zion stands in the light, while Egypt cowers in gloom. The light which shines upon her is 'the Glory of the Lord,' the ancient brightness that dwelt between the cherubim within the veil in the secret place of the Most High, and is now come out into the open world to envelop the desolate captive. Thus touched by the light she becomes light, and in her turn is bidden to shine. There is a very remarkable correspondence reiterated in my text between the illuminating God and the illuminated Zion. The word for shine is connected with the word for light, and might fairly be rendered 'lighten,' or 'be light.' Twice the phrase 'thy light' is employed; once to mean the light which is thine because it shines on thee; once to mean the light which is thine because it shines from thee. The other word, three times repeated, for *rising*, is the technical word which expresses the sunrise, and it is applied both to the flashing glory that falls upon Zion and to the light that gleams from her. Touched by the sun, she becomes a sun, and blazes in her heaven in a splendour that draws men's hearts. So, then, if that be the fair analysis of the words before us, they present to us some thoughts bearing on the Missionary work of the Church, and I gather them all up in three—the fact, the ringing summons, and the confident promise.

I. Now, as to the fact.

Beneath the poetry of my text there lie very definite conceptions of a very solemn and grave character, and these conceptions are the foundation of the ringing summons that follows, and which reposes upon a double basis—viz. '*for* thy light is come,' and '*for* darkness covers the earth.' There is a double element in the representation. We have a darkened earth, and a sunlit and a sunlike church; and unless we hold these two convictions—both of them—in firm grasp, and that not merely as convictions that influence our understanding, but as ever present forces acting on our emotions, our consciences, our wills, we shall not do the work which God has set us to do in the world. I need not dwell long on the former of these, or speak of that funeral pall that wraps the whole earth. Only remember that it is no darkness that came from His hand who forms the light and creates darkness, but is like the smoke that lies over our great cities—the work of many an earth-born fire, whose half-consumed foulness hides the sun from us. If we take the sulphureous and smoky pall that wraps the earth, and analyse its contents, they are these: the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of sorrow, the darkness of sin. Of ignorance; for throughout the wide regions that lie beneath that covering spread over all nations is there any certitude about God, about man, about morals, about responsibilities, about eternity? Peradventures, guesses, dreams, precious fragments of truth, twisted in with the worst of lies, noble aspirations side by side with bestial representations—these are the things on which our brethren repose, or try to repose. We do not forget that light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world.

We do not forget, of course, that everywhere there are feelings after Him, and everywhere there are gleams and glimpses of a vanishing light, else life were impossible; but oh, dear brethren, let us not forget either that the people sit in darkness of ignorance, which is the saddest darkness that can afflict men.

And it is a darkness of sorrow, for all the ills that flesh is heir to press, unalleviated and unsustained by any known helper in the heavens, upon millions of our fellows. They stand, as the great German poet describes himself as standing, in one of the most pathetic of his lyrics, before the marble image of the fair goddess, who has pity on her face and beauty raying from her limbs, but she has no arms. So tears fall undried. The light-hearted savage is a fiction. What a heavy gloom lies upon his past and his present, which darkens into an impenetrable mist that wraps and hides the future!

And the darkness is a darkness of sin as well as of sorrow and of ignorance. On that point I need not dwell. We all believe that all have 'sinned and come short of the glory of God,' and we all believe that idolatry, as we see it, and as it is wrought out, is an ally of impurity and of sin. The process is this: men make gods in their own image, and the gods make devils of the men. 'They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusteth in them.' We need no other principle than that to account for the degradation of heathenism and for the obscenities and foul transgression within the very courts of the temple.

Now, dear friends, that I may not dwell too long upon the A B C of our belief, let me urge you in one sentence to be on your guard against present-day tendencies which weaken the force of this solemn, tragical conviction as

to the realities of heathendom. The new science of comparative religion has done much for us. I am not saying one word against this pursuit, or the conclusions which are drawn from it. But I pray you to remember that the underlying truths buried beneath the system that any men hold as their religion are one thing, and the practical working of that system, as we see it in daily life, is altogether another. The actual character of heathenism is not to be learned from the sacred books of all nations and the precious gleams of wisdom and feeling after the Divine which we recognise in man. As a simple matter of fact, all over the world the religion of heathen nations is a mass of obscenity, intertwined so closely with nobler thoughts that the two seem to be inseparable. Unalleviated sorrows, hideous foulnesses, a gross ignorance covering all the most important realities for men—these are the facts with which we have to grapple. Do not let us forget them.

And on the other side, remember the contrasted picture here of the sunlit and sunny church. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of my text. 'We behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' If you and I are Christians, we are bound to believe in Him as the exclusive source of certainty. We hear from Him no peradventure, but His word is, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you,' and on that word we rest all our knowledge of God, of duty, of man, and of the future. Instead of fears, doubt, perhapses, we have a living Christ and His rock-word. And in Him is all joy, and in Him is the cleansing from all sin. And this threefold radiance, into which the one pure light may be analysed, falls upon us. It falls all over the world as well; but they

into whose hearts it has come, they whose faces are turned to it, they receive it in a sense in which the unreceptive and unresponsive darkness of the world does not. The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness will have none of it, and so it is darkness yet. The light shineth upon us, and if by His mercy we have opened our hearts to it, then, according to the profound teaching of this context, we are not only a sun-lighted but a sunlike Church, and to us the commandment comes, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come,' and has turned thy poor darkness into a sun too.

If we have the light we shall be light. That is but putting in a picturesque form the very central truth of Christianity. The last word of the gospel is transformation. We become like Him if we live near Him, and the end for which the Master became like unto us in His incarnation and passion was that we might become like to Him by the reception of His very own life unto our souls. Light makes many a surface on which it falls flash, but in the optics of earth it is the rays which are not absorbed that are reflected; but in this loftier region the illumination is not superficial but inward, and it is the light which is swallowed up within us that then comes forth from us. Christ will dwell in our hearts, and we shall be like some poor little diamond-shaped pane of glass in a cottage window which, when the sun smites it, is visible over miles of the plain. If that sun falls upon us, its image will be mirrored in our hearts and flashing in our lives. The clouds that lie over the sunset, though in themselves they be but poor, grey, and moist vapour, when smitten by its beneficent radiance, become not unworthy ministers and attendants upon its glory. So, my brethren, it may be with us, for

Christ comes to be our light. Because He is in us and with us we are changed into His likeness, and the names that are most appropriate to Him He shares with us. Is He the 'Son'?—we are sons. Is He 'the Light of the world'? His own lips tell us, 'Ye are the light of the world.' Is He the Christ? The Psalm says: 'Touch not my Christs, and do My prophets no harm.' Critics have quarrelled over these last chapters of the Book of Isaiah, as to whom the servant of the Lord is; whether he is the personal or collective Israel, whether he is Christ or His Church. Let us take the lesson that He and we are so united that His office that made the union possible, wherein He was sacrificed on the Cross for us all—belongs by derivation to His servants, and that He, the Sun of Righteousness, moves in the heavens circled by many another sun.

So, dear friends, these two convictions of these two facts, the dark earth, the sunlit, sunlike church, lie at the basis of all our missionary work. If once we begin to doubt about them, if once we begin to think that men have got a good deal of light already, and can do very well without much more, or if we at all are hesitant about our possession of the light, and the certitudes and the joys that are in it, then good-bye to our missionary zeal. We shall soon begin to ask the question, 'To what purpose is this waste?'—though the lips that first asked it, by the bye, did not much recommend it—and shall consider that money and resources and precious lives are too precious to be thrown away thus. But if we rightly appreciate the force of these twin principles, then we shall be ready to listen to the ringing summons.

II. We have here, in the second place, based upon these two facts, the summons to the Church.

'Shine, for thy light is come.' If we *have* light, we *are* light. If we are light, we shall shine; but the shining is not altogether spontaneous and effortless. Stars do not need to be bidden to shine nor candles either; but *we* need the exhortation, because there are many things that dim the brilliance of our light and interfere with its streaming forth. True, the property of light is to shine, but we can rob the inward light of its beams. The silent witness of a Christian life transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ is, perhaps, the best contribution that any of us can make to the spread of His kingdom. It is with us as it is with the great lights in the heavens. 'There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heart,' yet, 'their line has gone through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' So we may quietly ray out the light in us and witness the transforming power of our Master by the transparent purity of our lives. But the command suggests likewise effort, and that effort must be in the direction of the specific vocal proclamation of His name.

I take both these methods of fulfilling the command into my view, in the further remarks that I make, and I put that which I have to say upon this into three sentences: if we are light, we shall be able to shine; if we are light, we are bound to shine; if we are light, we shall wish to shine. We shall be able to shine. And man can manifest what he is unless he is a coward. Any man can talk about the things that are interesting to him if only they are interesting to him. Any man that has Jesus Christ can say so; and perhaps the utterance of the simple personal conviction is the best method of proclaiming His name. All other things are surplusage. They are good when they come, they may be done

without. Learning, eloquence, and the like of these, are the adornments of the lamp, but it does not matter whether the lamp be a gorgeous affair of gilt and crystal, or whether it be a poor piece of block tin; the main question is: are there wick and oil in it? The pitcher may be gold and silver, or costly china, or it may be a poor potsherd. Never mind. If there is water in it, it will be precious to a thirsty lip. And so, dear brethren, I press this upon you: every Christian man has the power, if he is a Christian, to proclaim his Master, and if he has the Light he will be able to show it. I pause for a moment to say that this suggests for us the condition of all faithful and effectual witness for Jesus Christ. Cultivate understanding and all other faculties as much as you like; but oh! you Christian ministers, as well as others in less official and public positions, remember this: the fitness to impart is to possess, and that being taken for granted, the main thing is secured. As long as the electric light is in contact with the battery, so long does it burn. Electricians have been trying during the past few years to make accumulators, things in which they can store the influence and put it away in a corner and use it so that the light need not be in connection with the battery; and they have not succeeded—at least it is only a very partial success. You and I cannot start accumulators. Let us remember that personal contact with Jesus is power, and only that personal contact is so. Arise, shine! but if thou hast gone out of the light, thou wilt shine no more.

But again, if we are light we are bound to shine. That is an obvious principle. The capacity to shine is the obligation to shine, for we are all knit together by such mystical cords in this strange brotherhood of hu-

manity that every one of us holds his possession as trust property for the use and behoof of others, and in the present case that which we have received, and the price at which we have received it, give an edge to the keenness of the obligation, and add a new grip to the stringency of the command. It is because Christ has given Himself thus to us that the possession of Him binds us to the imitation of His example, and the impartation of Him to all our brethren. The obligation lies at our doors, and cannot be delegated or devolved.

If we have light, we shall wish to shine. What shall we say about the Christian people who never really had such a wish? God forbid that I should say they have no light; but this I will say, it burns very dimly. Dear brethren, there is no better test of the depth and the purity of our personal attachment to, and possession of, our Master than the impulse that will spring from them to communicate Him to others. 'Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not.' That should be the word of every one of us, and it will be so in the measure in which we ourselves have thoroughly laid hold of Jesus Christ. 'This is a day of good tidings, and we cannot hold our peace,' said the handful of lepers in the camp. 'If we are silent some mischief will come to us.' 'Thy word, when I shut it up in my bones and said, I will speak no more in Thy name, was like a fire, and was weary of forbearing and I could not stay.' Brother, do you know anything of the divine necessity to share your blessing with the men around you? Did you ever feel what it was to carry a burden of the Lord that drove you to speech, and left you no rest until you had done what it impelled you to do? If not, I beseech you to ask yourselves whether you cannot get nearer to

the sun than away out there on the very edge of its system, receiving so few of its beams, and these so impotent that they can scarcely do more than melt the surface of the thick-ribbed ice that warps your spirit. If we are light we shall be enabled, we shall be bound, we shall wish, to shine. Christian men and women, is this true of you?

III. Lastly, notice here the confident promise.

'The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.' If we have the light we shall be light; if we are light we shall shine, and if we shine we shall attract. Certainly men and women with the light of Christ in them will draw others to them, just as many an eye that cannot look undazzled upon the sun can look upon it mirrored upon some polished surface. A painter will fling upon his canvas a scene that you and I, with our purblind eyes, have looked at hundreds of times, and seen no beauty; but when we gaze on the picture, then we know how fair it is. There is an attractive power in the light of Christ shining from the face of a man. Of course, we have to moderate our expectations. We have to remember that whilst it is true that some men will come to the light, it is also true that some men 'love the darkness, and will not come to the light because their deeds are evil'; and we have to remember that we have no right to anticipate rapid results. 'An inheritance may be begotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed,' said the wise man; and the history of the Christian Church in many of its missionary operations is a sad commentary upon the saying. We must remember that we cannot estimate how long the preparation for a change, which will be developed swiftly, may be. The sun on

autumn mornings shines upon the fog; and the people below, because there is a fog, do not know that it is shining; but it is doing its work on the upper layer all the while, and at length eats its way through the fleecy obstruction, which then swiftly disappears. That must be a very, very long day of which the morning twilight has been nineteen hundred years. Therefore, although the vision tarries, we may fall back with unswerving confidence on these words of my text—'The Gentiles shall come to the brightness of thy rising.'

But after all this has been said, are you satisfied with the rate of progress, are you satisfied with the swiftness of the fulfilment of such hopes? Whose fault is it that the rate of progress is what it is? Yours and mine and our predecessors'. There is such a thing as 'hasting the day of the Lord,' and there is such a thing as protracting the time of waiting. Dear brethren, the secret of our slow growth at home and abroad lies in my text. Fulfil the conditions and you will get the result; but if you are not shining by a light which is Christ's light, who promised that *it* would have attraction or draw men to it? A great deal of the work of the Christian Church —but do not let us hide ourselves in the generality of that word—a great deal of *our* work is artificial light, brewed out of retorts, and smelling sulphureous; and a great deal more of it is the phosphorescence that glimmers above decay. If the Christian Church has ceased in any measure, or in any of its members, to be able to attract by the exhibition of its light, let the Christian Church sit down and bethink itself of the sort of light it gives, and perhaps it will find a reason for its failure. It is Christ, the holy Christ, the loving Christ, the Christ in us making us wise and gentle, it is the Christ mani-

fested by word and by work, who will draw the nations to Him.

So, men and brethren, do you keep near your Master and live close by His side till you are drenched and saturated with His glory, and all your cold vapours turned into visible divinity and manifested Jesus. Keep near to Him. As long as a bit of scrap-iron touches a magnet, *it* is a magnet: as soon as the contact is broken it ceases to attract. If you live in the full sunshine of Christ and have Him, not merely playing upon the surface of your mind, but sinking deep down into it and transforming your whole being, then some men will, as they look at you, be filled with strange longings, and will say: 'Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.' So may you and I live, like the morning star, which, from its serene altitudes, touched into radiance by the sun unseen from the darkened plains, prophesies its rising to a sleeping world, and is content to be lost in the lustre of that unsetting Light!

WALLS AND GATES

'Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.'—ISAIAH lx. 18.

THE prophet reaches the height of eloquence in his magnificent picture of the restored Jerusalem, 'the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.' To him the city stands for the embodiment of the nation, and his vision of the future is moulded by his knowledge of the past. Israel and Jerusalem were to him the embodiments of the divine idea of God's dwelling with men, and of a society founded on the presence of God in its midst. We are not forcing meanings on his words which they will not bear, when we see in the society of men redeemed by Christ the perfect embodiment of his

vision. Nor is the prophet of the New Testament doing so when he casts his vision of the future which is to follow Resurrection and Judgment into a like form, and shows us the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.

The end of the world's history is to be, not a garden but a city, a visible community, bound together because God dwells in it, and yet not having lost the blessed characteristics of the Garden from which man set out on his long and devious march.

The Christian form of the prophet's vision is the Christian Society, and in that society, each individual member possesses his own portion of the common blessings, so that the great words of this text have a personal as well as a general application. We shall best bring out their rich contents by simply taking them as they stand, and considering what is promised by the two eloquent metaphors, which liken salvation to the walls and praise to the gates of the City of God.

I. Salvation is to be the city's wall.

Another prophet foretold that the returning exiles would dwell in a Jerusalem that had no walls, 'for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about'; and Isaiah sang, 'We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.' There is no need for material defences for the community or the individual whom God defends. Would that the Church had lived up to the height of that great thought! Would that we each believed it true in regard to our own lives! There are three ways in which this promise may be viewed. We may think of 'salvation' as meaning God's purpose to save. And then the comfort and sense of security will be derived from the thought that what He intends He performs, and that nothing can traverse

that purpose except our own rebellious self-will. They whom God designs to keep are kept; they whom God wills to save are saved, unless they oppose His will, which opposition is in itself to be lost, and leads to ultimate and irreparable loss.

We may think of salvation as an actually begun work. Then the comfort and sense of security will be derived from that great work by which salvation has begun to be ours. The work of Christ keeps us from all danger, and no foes can make a breach in that wall, nor reach those who stand safe behind its strong towers.

We may think of salvation as a personal experience, and then the comfort and sense of security will be derived from that blessed consciousness of possessing in some measure at least the spirit, not of bondage, but of a son. The consciousness of having 'salvation' is our best defence against spiritual foes and our best shield against temporal calamities.

It is good for us to live by faith, to be thrown back on our unseen protector, to feel with the psalmist, 'Thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety, though alone,' and to see the wall great and high that is drawn round our defenceless tent pitched on the sands of the flat desert.

II. Praise is to be the city's gate.

As to the Church, this prophecy anticipates the Apostle's teaching that the whole divine work of Redemption, from its fore-ordination before the foundation of the world, to its application to each sinful soul, is 'to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory' or, as he elsewhere expands and enriches the expression, 'to the praise of the glory of His grace.'

We are 'secretaries of His praise.' A gate is that by which the safe inhabitants go out into the region beyond,

and the outgoings of the active life of every Christian should be such as to make manifest the blessings that he enjoys within the shelter of the city's walls. Only if our hidden life is blessed with a begun salvation will our outward life be vocal with the music of praise. The gate will be praise if, and only if, the wall is salvation.

And praise is the gate by which we should go out into the world, even when the world into which we go is dark and the ways rough and hard. If we have the warm glow of a realised salvation in our hearts, sorrows that are but for a moment will not silence the voice of praise, though they may cast it into a minor key. The praise that rises from a sad heart is yet more melodious in God's ear than that which carols when all things go well. The bird that sings in a darkened cage makes music to its owner. 'Songs in the night' have a singular pathos and thrill the listeners. When we 'take the cup of salvation' and call on the name of the Lord, we shall offer to Him the sacrifices of thanksgiving, though He may recall some of the precious gifts that He gave. For He never takes away the wall of salvation which He has built around us, and as long as that wall stands, its gates will be praise. Submission, recognition of His will, and even 'silence because Thou didst it,' are praise to His ear.

THE JOY-BRINGER

'To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.'—Isaiah lxi. 3.

In the little synagogue of Nazareth Jesus began His ministry by laying His hand upon this great prophecy and saying, 'It is Mine! I have fulfilled it.' The prophet had been painting the ideal Messianic Deliverer, with

special reference to the return from the Babylonian captivity. That was 'the liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,' and about which he was thinking. But no external deliverance of that sort could meet the needs, nor satisfy the aspirations, of a soul that knows itself and its circumstances. Isaiah, or the man who goes by his name, spoke greater things than he knew. I am not going to enter upon questions of interpretation; but I may say, that no conception of Jewish prophecy can hold its ground which is not framed in the light of that great saying in the synagogue of Nazareth. So, then, we have here the 'Man of Sorrows,' as this very prophet calls Him in another place, presenting Himself as the Transformer of sorrow and the Bringer of joy, in regard to infinitely deeper griefs than those which sprang in the heart of the nation because of the historical captivity.

There is another beautiful thing in our text, which comes out more distinctly if we follow the Revised Version, and read 'to give unto them a *garland* for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.' There we have two contrasted pictures suggested: one of a mourner with grey ashes strewed upon his dishevelled locks, and his spirit clothed in gloom like a black robe; and to him there comes One who, with gentle hand, smoothes the ashes out of his hair, trains a garland round his brow, anoints his head with oil, and, stripping off the trappings of woe, casts about him a bright robe fit for a guest at a festival. That is the miracle that Jesus Christ can do for every one, and is ready to do for us, if we will let Him. Let us look at this wonderful transformation, and at the way by which it is effected.

The first point I would make is that—

I. Jesus Christ is the Joy-bringer to men because He is the Redeemer of men.

Remember that in the original application of my text to the deliverance from captivity, this gift of joy and change of sorrow into gladness was no independent and second bestowment, but was simply the issue of the one that preceded it, viz., the gift of liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. The gladness was a gladness that welled up in the heart of the captives set free, and coming out from the gloom of the Babylonian dungeon into the sunshine of God's favour, with their faces set towards Zion 'with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.'

Now you have only to keep firm hold of this connection between these two thougts to come to the crown and centre-point of this great prohecy, as far as it applies to us, and that is that it is Christ as the Emancipator, Christ as the Deliverer, Christ as He who brings us out of the prison of bondage of the tyranny of sin, who is the great Joy-Giver. For there is no real, deep, fundamental and impregnable gladness possible to a man until his relations to God have been rectified, and until, with these rectified relations, with the consciousness of forgiveness and the divine love nestling warm at his heart, he has turned himself away from his dread and his sin, and has recognised in his Father God 'the gladness of his joy.'

Of course, there are many of us who feel that life is sufficiently comfortable and moderately happy, or at least quite tolerable, without any kind of reference to God at all. And in this day of growing materialism, and growing consequent indifference to the deepest needs of the

spirit and the claims of religion, more and more men are finding, or fancying that they find, that they can rub along somehow, and have a fair share of gladness and satisfaction, without any need for a redeeming gospel and a forgiving Christ. But about all that kind of surface-joy the old words are true, 'even in laughter the heart is sorrowful,' and hosts of us are satisfied with joys which Jesus has no part in bringing, simply because our truest self has never once awakened. When it does—and perhaps it will do so with some of you, like the sleeping giant that is fabled to lie beneath the volcano whose sunny slopes are smiling with flowers—then you will find out that no one can bring real joy who does not take away guilt and sin.

Jesus Christ is the Joy-bringer, because Jesus Christ is the Emancipator. And true gladness is the gladness that springs from the conscious possession of liberty from the captivity which holds men slaves to evil and to their worst selves. Brethren, let us not fancy that these surface-joys are the joys adequate to a human spirit. They are ignoble, and they are infinitely foolish, because a touch of an awakened conscience, a stirring of one's deeper self, can scatter them all to pieces. So then, that is my first thought.

Let us suggest a second, that—

II. Jesus Christ transforms sorrow because He transforms the mourner.

In my text, all that this Joy-bringer and Transmuter of grief into its opposite is represented as doing is on the man who feels the sorrow. And although, as I have said, the text, in its original position, is simply a deduction from the previous great prophecy which did point to a change of circumstances, and although Jesus

does bring the 'joy of salvation' by a great change in a man's relations, yet in regard to the ordinary sorrows of life, He affects these not so much by an operation upon our circumstances as by an operation upon ourselves, and transforms sorrow and brings gladness, because He transforms the man who endures it. The landscape remains the same, the difference is in the colour of the glass through which we look at it. Instead of having it presented through some black and smoked medium, we see it through what the painter calls a 'Claude Lorraine' glass, tinged golden, and which throws its own lovely light upon all that it shows us. It is possible—the eye that looks being purged and cleansed, so as to see more clearly—that the facts remaining identical, their whole aspect and bearing may be altered, and that which was felt, and rightly felt, to be painful and provocative of sadness and gloom, may change its character and beget a solemn joy. It would be but a small thing to transform the conditions; it is far better and higher to transform us. We all need, and some of us, I have no doubt, do especially need, to remember that the Lord who brings this sudden transformation for us, does so by His operation within us, and, therefore, to that operation we should willingly yield ourselves.

How does He do this? One answer to that question is—by giving to the man with ashes on his head and gloom wrapped about his spirit, sources of joy, if he will use them, altogether independent of external circumstances. 'Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine . . . yet will I rejoice in the Lord.' And every Christian man, especially when days are dark and clouds are gathering, has it open to him, and is bound to use the possibility, to turn away his

mind from the external occasions of sadness, and fix it on the changeless reason for deep and unchanging joy —the sweet presence, the strong love, the sustaining hand, the infinite wisdom, of his Father God.

Brethren, "the paradox of the Christian life is, 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' Christ calls for no hypocritical insensibility to 'the ills that flesh is heir to.' He has sanctioned by His example the tears that flow when death hurts loving hearts. He commanded the women of Jerusalem to 'weep for themselves and for their children.' He means that we should feel the full bitterness and pain of sorrows which will not be medicinal unless they are bitter, and will not be curative unless they cut deep. But He also means that whilst thus we suffer as men, in the depths of our own hearts we should, at the same time, be turning away from the sufferings and their cause, and fixing our hearts, quiet even then amidst the distractions, upon God Himself. Ah! it is hard to do, and because we do not do it, the promise that He will turn the sorrow into joy often seems to be a vain word for us.

It is not ours to rejoice as the world does, nor is it ours to sorrow as those who have no hope, or as those who have no God with them. But the two opposite emotions may, to a large extent, be harmonised and co-existent in a Christian heart, and, since they can be, they should be. The Christian in sorrow should be as an island set in some stormy sea, with wild waves breaking against its black, rocky coast, and the wind howling around it, but in the centre of it there is a deep and shady dell 'that heareth not the loud winds when they call,' and where not a leaf is moved by the tempest. In a like depth of calm and central tranquillity it is possi-

ble for us to live, even while the storm hurtles its loudest on the outermost coasts of our being; 'as sorrowful, yet' always rejoicing,' because the Joy-bringer has opened for us sources of gladness independent of externals.

And then there is another way by which, for us, if we will use our privileges, the sorrows of life may be transmuted, because we, contemplating them, have come to a changed understanding of their meaning. That is, after all, the secret charm to be commended to us at all times, but to be commended to us most when our hearts are heavy and the days are dark around us. We shall never understand life if we class its diverse events simply under the two opposite categories of good—evil; prosperity—adversity; gains—losses; fulfilled expectations—disappointed hopes. Put them all together under one class—discipline and education; means for growth; means for Christlikeness. When we have found out, what it takes a long while for us to learn, that the lancet and the bandage are for the same purpose, and that opposite weathers conspire to the same end, that of the harvest, the sting is out of the sorrow, the poison is wiped off the arrow. We can have, if not a solemn joy, at least a patient acquiescence, in the diversities of operation, when we learn that the same hand is working in all for the same end, and that all that contributes to that end is good.

Here we may suggest a third way by which a transformation wrought upon ourselves transforms the aspect of our sorrows, and that is, that possessing independent sources of joy, and having come to learn the educational aspect of all adversity, we hereby are brought by Jesus Christ Himself to the position of submission. And that is the most potent talisman to transform mourning into

praise. An accepted grief is a conquered grief; a conquered grief will very soon be a comforted grief; and a comforted grief is a joy. By all these means Jesus Christ, here and now, is transmuting the lead and iron of our griefs into the gold of a not ignoble nor transient gladness.

And may I say one last word? My text suggests not only these two points to which I have already referred—viz. that Jesus Christ is the Joy-bringer because He is the Emancipator, and that He transforms sorrow by transforming the mourner—but, lastly, that

III. Jesus gives joy after sorrow.

'Nevertheless, afterward' is a great word of glowing encouragement for all sad hearts. 'Fools and children,' says the old proverb, 'should not see half-done work'; at least, they should not judge it. When the ploughshare goes deep into the brown, frosty ground, the work is only begun. The earth may seem to be scarped and hurt, and, if one might say, to bleed, but in six months' time 'you scarce can see' the soil for waving corn. Yes; and sorrow, as some of us could witness, is the forecast of purest joy. I have no doubt that there are men and women here who could say, 'I never knew the power of God, and the blessedness of Christ as a Saviour, until I was in deep affliction, and when everything else went dark, then in His light I saw light.' Do not some of you know the experience? and might we not all know it? and why do we not know it?

Jesus Christ, even here and now, gives these blessed results of our sorrows, if they are taken to the right place, and borne in right fashion. For it is they 'that mourn in Zion' that He thus blesses. There are some of us, I fear, whose only resource in trouble is to fling

ourselves into some work, or some dissipation. There are people who try to work away their griefs, as well as people who try feverishly to drink them away. And there are some of us whose only resource for deliverance from our sorrows is that, after the wound has bled all it can, it stops bleeding, and the grief simply dies by lapse of time and for want of fuel. An affliction wasted is the worst of all waste. But if we carry our grief into the sanctuary, then, here and now, it will change its aspect and become a solemn joy.

I say nothing about the ultimate result where every sorrow rightly borne shall be represented in the future life by some stage in grace or glory, where every tear shall be crystallised, if I might say so, into a flashing diamond, which flings off the reflection of the divine light, where 'there shall be no sorrow nor sighing, nor any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' When the lesson has been learned, God burns the rod.

But, brethren, there is another sadder transformation. I have been speaking about the transformation of sorrow into joy. There is also the transformation of joy into sorrow. I spoke a little while ago about the 'laughter' in which the heart is 'sorrowful,' and the writer from whom I quoted the words goes on to say, 'The end of that mirth is heaviness.' 'Thereof cometh in the end despondency and madness.' I saw, on a hilltop, a black circle among the grass and heather. There had been a bonfire there on Coronation Night, and it had all died down, and that was the end—a hideous ring of scorched barrenness amidst the verdure. Take care that your gladnesses do not die down like that, but that they are pure, and being pure are undying. Union with Jesus Christ makes sorrow light, and secures that

it shall merge at last into 'joy unspeakable and full of joy.' I believe that separation from Christ makes joy shallow, and makes it certain that at last, instead of a garland, shall be ashes on the head, and that, instead of a festal robe, the spirit shall be wrapped in a garment of heaviness.

THE HEAVENLY WORKERS AND THE EARTHLY WATCHERS

'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest. . . . I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest.'—ISAIAH lxii. 1, 6, 7.

Two remarks of an expository nature will prepare the way for the consideration of these words. The first is that the speaker is the personal Messiah. The second half of Isaiah's prophecies forms one great whole, which might be called The Book of the Servant of the Lord. One majestic figure stands forth on its pages with ever-growing clearness of outline and form. The language in which He is described fluctuates at first between the collective Israel and the one Person who is to be all that the nation had failed to attain. But even near the beginning of the prophecy we read of 'My servant whom I uphold,' whose voice is to be low and soft, and whose meek persistence is not to fail till He have 'set judgment in the earth.' And as we advance the reference to the nation becomes less and less possible, and the recognition of the person more and more imperative. At first the music of the prophetic song seems to move uncertainly amid sweet sounds, from which the true theme by degrees emerges, and thenceforward recurs over and over again with deeper, louder harmonies clustering

about it, till it swells into the grandeur of the choral close.

In the chapter before our text we read, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.' Throughout the remainder of the prophecy, with the exception of one section which contains the prayer of the desolate Israel, this same person continues to speak; and who he is was taught in the synagogue of Nazareth. Whilst the preceding chapter, then, brings in Christ as proclaiming the great work of deliverance for which He is anointed of God, the following chapter presents Him as 'treading the wine-press alone,' which is a symbol of the future judgment by the glorified Saviour. Between these two prophecies of the earthly life and of the still future judicial energy, this chapter of our text lies, referring, as I take it, to the period between these two—that is, to all the ages of the Church's development on earth. For these Christ here promises His continual activity, and His continual bestowment of grace to His servants who watch the walls of His Jerusalem.

The second point to be noticed is the remarkable parallelism in the expressions selected as the text: 'I will not hold *My* peace'; the watchmen 'shall never hold *their* peace.' And His command to them is literally, 'Ye that remind Jehovah—no *rest* (or silence) to you, and give not *rest* to Him.'

So we have here Christ, the Church, and God all represented as unceasingly occupied in the one great work of establishing 'Zion' as the centre of light, salvation, and righteousness for the whole world. The consideration of these three perpetual activities may open for us some great truths and stimulating lessons.

I. First, then, The glorified Christ is constantly working for His Church.

We are too apt to regard our Lord's real work as all lying in the past, and, from the very greatness of our estimate of what He has done, to forget the true importance of what He evermore does. 'Christ that died' is the central object of trust and contemplation for devout souls—and that often to the partial hiding of Christ that is 'risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' But Scripture sets forth the present glorious life of our ascended Lord under two contrasted and harmonious aspects—as being rest, and as being continuous activity in the midst of rest. He was 'received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.' In that session on the throne manifold and mighty truths are expressed. It proclaims the full accomplishment of all the purposes of His earthly ministry; it emphasises the triumphant completion of His redeeming work by His death; it proclaims the majesty of His nature, which returns to the 'glory which He had with the Father before the world was'; it shows to the world, as on some coronation day, its King on His throne, girded with power and holding the far-reaching sceptre of the universe; it prophesies for men, in spite of all present sin and degradation, a share in the dominion which manhood has in Christ attained, for though we see not yet all things put under Him, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. It prophesies, too, His final victory over all that sets itself in unavailing antagonism to His love. It points us backward to an historical fact as the basis of all our hopes for ourselves and for our fellows, giving us the assurance that the world's deliverance will come from the slow operation of

the forces already lodged in its history by Christ's finished work. It points us forwards to a future as the goal of all these hopes, giving us that confidence of victory which He has who, having kindled the fire on earth, henceforward sits at God's right hand, waiting in the calm and sublime patience of conscious omnipotence and clear foreknowledge 'until His enemies become His footstool.'

But whilst on the one side Christ rests as from a perfected work which needs no addition nor repetition, on the other He 'rests not day nor night.' And this aspect of His present state is as distinctly set forth in Scripture as that is. Indeed the words already quoted as embodying the former phase contain the latter also. For is not 'the right hand of God' the operative energy of the divine nature? And is not 'sitting at the right hand of God' equivalent to possessing and wielding that unwearied, measureless power? Are there not blended together in this pregnant phrase the ideas of profoundest calm and of intensest action, that being expressed by the attitude, and this by the locality? Therefore does the evangelist who uses the expression expand it into words which wonderfully close his gospel, with the same representation of Christ's swift and constant activity as he had been all along pointing out as characterising His life on earth. 'They went forth,' says he, 'and preached everywhere'—so far the contrast between the Lord seated in the heavens and His wandering servants fighting on earth is sharp and almost harsh. But the next words tone it down, and weave the two apparently discordant halves of the picture into a whole: 'the Lord *working* with them.' Yes! in all His rest He is full of work, in all their toils He shares, in all their journeys

His presence goes beside them. Whatever they do is His deed, and the help that is done upon the earth He doeth it all Himself.

Is not this blessed conviction of Christ's continuous operation in and for His Church that which underlies, as has often been pointed out, the language of the introduction to the Acts of the Apostles, where mention is made of the former treatise that told 'all which Jesus *began* both to do and teach'? The gospel records the beginning, the Book of the Acts the continuance; it is one biography in two volumes. Being yet present with them He spoke and acted. Being exalted He 'speaketh from heaven,' and from the throne carries on the endless series of His works of power and healing. The whole history is shaped by the same conviction. Everywhere 'the Lord' is the true actor, the source of all the life which is in the Church, the arranger of all the providences which affect its progress. The Lord adds to the Church daily. His name works miracles. To the Lord believers are added. His angel, His Spirit, bring messages to His servants. He appears to Paul, and speaks to Ananias. The Gentiles turn to the Lord because the hand of the Lord is with the preachers. The Lord calls Paul to carry the gospel to Macedonia. The Lord opens the heart of Lydia, and so throughout. Not 'the Acts of the Apostles,' but 'the Acts of the Lord in and by His servants,' is the accurate title of this book. The vision which flashed angel radiance on the face, and beamed with divine comfort into the heart, of Stephen, was a momentary revelation of an abiding reality, and completes the representation of the Saviour throned beside Almighty power. He beheld his Lord, not seated, as if careless or resting, while His servant's need was

so sore, but as if risen with intent to help, and ready to defend—'*standing* on the right hand of God.'

And when once again the heavens opened to the rapt eyes of John in Patmos, the Lord whom he beheld was not only revealed as glorified in the lustre of the inaccessible light, but as actively sustaining and guiding the human reflectors of it. He 'holdeth the seven stars in His right hand,' and '*walketh* in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.'

Not otherwise does my text represent the present relation of Christ to His Church. It speaks of a continuous forth-putting of power, which it is, perhaps, not overfanciful to regard as dimly set forth here in a twofold form—namely, work and word. At all events, that division stands out clearly on the pages of the New Testament, which ever holds forth the double truth of our Lord's constant action on, in, through, and for His Zion, and of our High Priest's constant intercession.

'I will not rest.' Through all the ages His power is in exercise. He inspires in good men all their wisdom, and every grace of life and character. He uses them as His weapons in the contest of His love with the world's hatred; but the hand that forged, and tempered, and sharpened the blade is that which smites with it; and the axe must not boast itself against him that heweth. He, the Lord of lords, orders providences, and shapes the course of the world for that Church which is His witness: 'Yea, He reproved kings for their sake, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.' The ancient legend which told how, on many a well-fought field, the ranks of Rome discerned through the battle-dust the gleaming weapons and white steeds of the Great Twin Brethren far in front of the solid legions,

is true in loftier sense in our Holy War. We may still see the vision which the leader of Israel saw of old, the man with the drawn sword in his hand, and hear the majestic word, 'As Captain of the Lord's host am I now come.' The Word of God, with vesture dipped in blood, with eyes alit with His flaming love, with the many crowns of unlimited sovereignty upon His head, rides at the head of the armies of heaven; 'and in righteousness doth He judge and make war.' For the single soul struggling with daily tasks and petty cares, His help is near and real, as for the widest work of the collective whole. He sends none of us tasks in which He has no share. The word of this Master is never 'Go,' but 'Come.' He unites Himself with all our sorrows, with all our efforts. 'The Lord also working with them' is a description of all the labours of Christian men, be they great or small.

Nor is this all. There still remains the wonderful truth of His continuous intercession for us. In its widest meaning that word expresses the whole of the manifold ways by which Christ undertakes and maintains our cause. But the narrower signification of prayer on our behalf is applicable, and is in Scripture applied, to our Lord. As on earth, the climax of all His intercourse with His disciples was that deep yet simple prayer which forms the Holy of Holies of John's Gospel, so in heaven His loftiest office for us is set forth under the figure of His intercession. Before the Throne stands the slain Lamb, and therefore do the elders in the outer circle bring acceptable praises. Within the veil stands the Priest, with the names of the tribes blazing on the breastplate and on the shoulders of His robes, near the seat of love, near the arm of power. And whatever difficulty may surround that idea of Christ's priestly

intercession, this at all events is implied in it, that the mighty work which He accomplished on earth is ever present to the divine mind as the ground of our acceptance and the channel of our blessings; and this further, that the utterance of Christ's will is ever in harmony with the divine purpose. Therefore His prayer has in it a strange tone of majesty, and, if we may so say, of command, as of one who knows that He is ever heard: '*I will* that they whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.'

The instinct of the Church has, from of old, laid hold of an event in His earthly life to shadow forth this great truth, and has bid us see a pledge and a symbol of it in that scene on the Lake of Galilee: the disciples toiling in the sudden storm, the poor little barque tossing on the waters tinged by the wan moon, the spray dashing over the wearied rowers. They seem alone, but up yonder, in some hidden cleft of the hills, their Master looks down on all the weltering storm, and lifts His voice in prayer. Then when the need is sorest, and the hope least, He comes across the waves, making their surges His pavement, and using all opposition as the means of His approach, and His presence brings calmness, and immediately they are at the land.

So we have not only to look back to the Cross, but up to the Throne. From the Cross we hear a voice, 'It is finished.' From the Throne a voice, 'For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest.'

II. Secondly, Christ's servants on earth derive from Him a like perpetual activity for the same object.

The Lord, who in the former portion of these verses declares His own purpose of unwearied action for Zion,

associates with Himself in the latter portion the watchmen, whom He appoints and endows for functions in some measure resembling His own, and exercised with constancy derived from Him. 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night.' On the promise follows, as ever, a command (for all divine gifts involve the responsibility of their use, and it is not His wont either to bestow without requiring, or to require before bestowing), 'Ye that remind Jehovah, keep not silence.'

There is distinctly traceable here a reference to a twofold form of occupation devolving on these Christ-sent servants. They are watchmen, and they are also God's remembrancers. In the one capacity as in the other, their voices are to be always heard. The former metaphor is common in the Old Testament, as a designation of the prophetic office, but, in accordance with the genius of the New Testament, as expressed on Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on the lowly as well as on the high, on the young as on the old, and all prophesied, it may be fairly extended to designate not some select few, but the whole mass of Christian people. The watchman's office falls to be done by all who see the coming peril, and have a tongue to echo it forth. The remembrancer's priestly office belongs to every member of Christ's priestly kingdom, the lowest and least of whom has the privilege of unrestrained entry into God's presence-chamber, and the power of blessing the world by faithful prayer. What should we think of a citizen in a beleaguered city, who saw the enemy mounting the very ramparts, and gave no alarm because that was the sentry's business? In such extremity every man is a soldier, and women and children can at least keep watch

and raise shrill cries of warning. The gifts, then, here promised, and the duties that flow from them, are not the prerogatives or the tasks of any class or order, but the heritage and the burden of the Lord to every member of His Church.

Our voices should ever be heard on earth. A solemn message is committed to us, by the very fact of our belief in Jesus Christ and His work. With that faith come responsibilities of which no Christian can denude himself. To warn the wicked man to turn from His wickedness; to blow the trumpet when we see the sword coming; to catch ever gleaming on the horizon, like the spears of an army through the dust of the march, the outriders and advance-guard of the coming of Him whose coming is life or death to all, and to lift up our voices with strength and say, 'Behold your God'; to peal into the ears of men, sunken in earthliness and dreaming of safety, the cry which may startle and save; to ring out in glad tones to all who wearily ask, 'Watchman, what of the night? will the night soon pass?' the answer which the slow dawning east has breathed into our else stony lips, 'The morning cometh'; to proclaim Christ, who came once to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, who comes ever, through the ages, to bless and uphold the righteousness which He loves and to destroy the iniquity which He hates, who will come at the last to judge the world—this is the never-ending task of the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem. The New Testament calls it 'preaching,' proclaiming as a herald does. And both metaphors carry one common lesson of the manner in which the work should be done. With clear loud voice, with earnestness and decision, with faithfulness and self-oblivion, forgetting himself in his

message, must the herald sound out the will of his King, the largess of his Lord. And the watchman who stands on his watch-tower whole nights, and sees foemen creeping through the gloom, or fire bursting out among the straw-roofed cottages within the walls, shouts with all his might the short, sharp alarm, that wakes the sleepers to whom slumber were death. Let us ponder the pattern.

Our voices should ever be heard in heaven. They who trust God remind Him of His promises by their very faith; it is a mute appeal to His faithful love, which He cannot but answer. And, beyond that, their prayers come up for a memorial before God, and have as real an effect in furthering Christ's kingdom on earth as is exercised by their entreaties and proclamations to men.

How distinctly these words of our text define the region within which our prayers should ever move, and the limits which bound their efficacy! They *remind* God. Then the truest prayer is that which bases itself on God's uttered will, and the desires which are born of our own fancies or heated enthusiasms have no power with Him. The prayer that prevails is a reflected promise. Our office in prayer is but to receive on our hearts the bright rays of His word, and to flash them back from the polished surface to the heaven from whence they came.

These two forms of action ought to be inseparable. Each, if genuine, will drive us to the other, for who could fling himself into the watchman's work, with all its solemn consequences, knowing how weak his voice was, and how deaf the ears that should hear, unless he could bring God's might to his help? and who could honestly remind God of His promises and forget his own

responsibilities? Prayerless work will soon slacken, and never bear fruit; idle prayer is worse than idle. You cannot part them if you would. How much of the busy occupation which is called 'Christian work' is detected to be spurious by this simple test! How much so-called prayer is reduced by it to mere noise, no better than the blaring trumpet or the hollow drum!

The power for both is derived from Christ. He sets the watchmen; He commands the remembrancers. From Him flows the power, from His good Spirit comes the desire, to proclaim the message. That message is the story of His life and death. But for what He does and is we should have nothing to say; but for His gift we should have no power to say it; but for His influence we should have no will to say it. He commands and fits us to be intercessors, for His mighty work brings us near to God; He opens for us access with confidence to God. He inspires our prayers. He 'hath made us priests to God.'

And, as the Christian power of discharging these two-fold duties is drawn from Christ, so our pattern is His manner of discharging them, and the condition of receiving the power is to abide in Him. He proposes Himself as our Example. He calls us to no labours which He has not Himself shared, nor to any earnestness or continuance in prayer which He has not Himself shown forth. This Master works in front of His men. The farmer that goes first among all the sowers, and heads the line of reapers in the yellowing harvest-field, may well have diligent servants. Our Master 'went forth, weeping, bearing precious seed,' and has left it in our hands to sow in all furrows. Our Master is the Lord of the harvest, and has borne the heat of the day before

His servants. Look at the amount of work, actual hard work, compressed into these three short years of His ministry. Take the records of the words He spake on that last day of His public teaching, and see what unwearied toil they represent. Ponder upon that life till you catch the spirit which breathed through it all, and, like Him, embrace gladly the welcome necessity of labour for God, under the sense of a vocation conferred upon you, and of the short space within which your service must be condensed. 'I must work the work of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.'

Christ asks no romantic impossibilities from us, but He does ask a continuous, systematic discharge of the duties which depend on our relation to the world, and on our relation to Him. Let it be our life's work to show forth His praise; let the very atmosphere in which we move and have our being be prayer. Let two great currents set ever through our days, which two, like the great movements in the ocean of the air, are but the upper and under halves of the one movement—that beneath with constant energy of desire rushing in from the cold poles to be warmed and expanded at the tropics, where the all-moving sun pours his directest rays; that above charged with rich gifts from the Lord of light, glowing with heat drawn from Him, and made diffusive by His touch, spreading itself out beneficent and life-bringing into all colder lands, swathing the world in soft, warm folds, and turning the polar ice into sweet waters.

In the tabernacle of Israel stood two great emblems of the functions of God's people, which embodied these two sides of the Christian life. Day by day, there ascended from the altar of incense the sweet odour, which sym-

bolised the fragrance of prayer as it wreathes itself upwards to the heavens. Night by night, as darkness fell on the desert and the camp, there shone through the gloom the hospitable light of the great golden candlestick with its seven lamps, whose steady rays outburned the stars that paled with the morning. Side by side they proclaimed to Israel its destiny to be the light of the world, to be a kingdom of priests.

The offices and the honour have passed over to us, and we shall fall beneath our obligations unless we let our light shine constantly before men, and let our voice rise like a fountain night and day' before God—even as He did who, when every man went to his own house, went alone to the Mount of Olives, and in the morning, when every man returned to his daily task, went into the Temple and taught. By His example, by His gifts, by the motive of His love, our resting, working Lord says to each of us, 'Ye that remind God, keep not silence.' Let us answer, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest.'

III. Finally, The constant activity of the servants of Christ will secure the constant operation of God's power.

'*Give* Him no rest': let there be no cessation to Him. These are bold words, which many people would not have been slow to rebuke if they had been anywhere else than in the Bible. Those who remind God are not to suffer Him to be still. The prophet believes that they can regulate the flow of divine energy, can stir up the strength of the Lord.

It is easy to puzzle ourselves with insoluble questions about the co-operation of God's power and man's; but practically, is it not true that God reaches His end, of the

establishment of Zion, through the Church? He has not barely willed that the world should be saved, nor barely that it should be saved through Christ, nor barely that it should be saved through the knowledge of Christ; but His will is that the world shall be saved, by faith in the person and work of Christ, proclaimed as a gospel by men who believe it. And, as a matter of fact, is it not true that the energy with which God's power in the gospel manifests itself depends on the zeal and activity and prayerfulness of the Church? The great reservoir is always full—full to the brim; however much may be drawn from it, the water sinks not a hairsbreadth; but the bore of the pipe and the power of the pumping-engine determine the rate at which the stream flows from it. 'He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.' The obstruction of indifference dammed back the water of life. The city perishes for thirst if the long line of aqueduct that strides across the plain towards the home of the mountain torrents be ruinous, broken down, choked with rubbish.

God is always the same—equally near, equally strong, equally gracious. But our possession of His grace, and the impartation of His grace through us to others, vary, because our faith, our earnestness, our desires, vary. True, these no doubt are also His gifts and His working, and nothing that we say now touches in the least on the great truth that God is the sole originator of all good in man; but while believing that, as no less sure in itself than blessed in its message of confidence and consolation to us, we also have to remember, 'If any man open the door, I will come in to him.' We may have as much of God as we want, as much as we can hold, far more than we deserve. And if ever the victorious power of His

Church seems to be almost paling to defeat, and His servants to be working no deliverance upon the earth, the cause is not to be found in Him who is 'without variableness,' nor in His gifts, which are 'without repentance,' but solely in us, who let go our hold of the Eternal Might. No ebb withdraws the waters of that great ocean; and if sometimes there be sand and ooze where once the flashing flood brought life and motion, it is because careless warders have shut the sea-gates.

An awful responsibility lies on us. We can resist and refuse, or we can open our hearts and draw into ourselves His strength. We can bring into operation those energies which act through faithful men faithfully proclaiming the faithful saying; or we can limit the Holy One of Israel. 'Why could not we cast him out?' 'Because of your unbelief.'

With what grand confidence, then, may the weakest of us go to his task. We have a right to feel that in all our labour God works with us; that, in all our words for Him, it is not we that speak, but the Spirit of our Father that speaks in us; that if humbly and prayerfully, with self-distrust and resolute effort to crucify our own intrusive individuality, we wait for Him to enshrine Himself within us, strength will come to us, drawn from the deep fountains of God, and we too shall be able to say, 'Not I, but the grace of God in me.'

How this sublime confidence should tell on our characters, destroying all self-confidence, repressing all pride, calming all impatience, brightening all despondency, and ever stirring us anew to deeds worthy of the 'exceeding greatness of the power which worketh in us'—I can only suggest.

On all sides motives for strenuous toil press in upon us

—chiefly those great examples which we have now been contemplating. But, besides these, there are other forms of activity which may point the same lesson. Look at the energy *around* us. We live in a busy time. Life goes swiftly in all regions. Men seem to be burning away faster than ever before, in an atmosphere of pure oxygen. Do we work as hard for God as the world does for itself? Look at the energy *beneath* us: how evil in every form is active; how lies and half-truths propagate themselves quick as the blight on a rose-tree; how profligacy, and crime, and all the devil's angels are busy on his errands. If *we* are sitting drowsy by our campfires, the enemy is on the alert. You can hear the tramp of their legions and the rumble of their artillery through the night as they march to their posts on the field. It is no time for God's sentinels to nod. If they sleep, the adversary does not, but glides in the congenial darkness, sowing his baleful tares. Do we work as hard for God as the emissaries of evil do for their master? Look at the energy *above* us. On the throne of the universe is the immortal Power who slumbereth not nor sleepeth. Before the altar of the heavens is the Priest of the world, the Lord of His Church, 'who ever liveth to make intercession for us.' Round Him stand perfected spirits, the watchmen on the walls of the New Jerusalem, who 'rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.' From His presence come, filling the air with the rustle of their swift wings and the light of their flame-faces, the ministering spirits who evermore 'do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word.' And we, Christian brethren, where are we in all this magnificent concurrence of activity, for purposes which ought to be dear to our hearts

as they are to the heart of God? Do we work for Him as He and all that are with Him do? Is His will done by us on earth, as it is heaven?

Alas! alas! have we not all been like those three apostles whose eyes were heavy with sleep even while the Lord was wrestling with the tempter under the gnarled olives in the pale moonlight of Gethsemane? Let us arouse ourselves from our sloth. Let us lift up our cry to God: 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, as in the ancient days in the generations of old'; and the answer shall sound from the heavens to us as it did to the prophet, an echo of his prayer turned into a command, 'Awake, awake, put on *thy* strength, O Zion.'

MIGHTY TO SAVE

'Mighty to save.'—ISAIAH lxiii. 1.

WE have here a singularly vivid and dramatic prophecy, thrown into the form of a dialogue between the prophet and a stranger whom he sees from afar striding along from the mountains of Edom, with elastic step, and dyed garments. The prophet does not recognise him, and asks who he is. The Unknown answers, 'I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' Another question follows, seeking explanation of the splashed crimson garments of the stranger, and its answer tells of a tremendous act of retributive destruction which he has recently launched at the nations hostile to 'My redeemed.'

Now we note that this prophecy follows, both in the order of the book and in the evolution of events, on those in chapter lxi., which referred to our Lord's work on

earth, and in chapter lxii., which has for part of its theme His intercession in heaven. And we are entitled to take the view that the place as well as the substance of this prophecy referred to the solemn act of final Judgment in which the returning Lord will manifest Himself. Very significant is it that the prophet does not recognise in this Conqueror, with blood-bespattered robes, the meek sufferer of chapter liii., or Him who in chapter lxi. came to bind up the broken-hearted. And very instructive is it that the title in our text comes from the stranger's own lips, as relevant to the tremendous act of judgment from which He is seen returning. The title might seem rather to look back to the former manifestation of Him as bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows. It does indeed, thank God, look back to that never-to-be-forgotten miracle of mercy and power, but it also brings within the sweep of His saving might the judgment still to come.

I. The mighty Saviour as made known in the past and present.

We think much of the meek and gentle side of Christ's character. Perhaps we do not think enough of the strength of it. We trace His great sacrifice to His love, and we can never sufficiently adore that incomparable manifestation of a love deeper than our plummets can fathom. But probably we do not sufficiently realise what gigantic strength went to the completion of that sacrifice. We know the solemn imagining of a great artist who has painted a colossal Death overbearing the weak resistance of a puny Love; but here love is the giant, and his sovereign command brings Death obedient to it, to do his work. Yes, that weak man hanging on the Cross is therein revealed as 'the power of God.'

Strange clothing of weakness which yet cannot hide the mighty limbs that wear it!

And if we think of our Lord's life we see the same combination of gentleness and power. His very name rings with memories of the captain whose one commanded duty was to 'be strong and of a good courage.'

In Him was all strength of manhood—inflexible, iron will, unchanging purpose, strength from consecration, strength from righteousness. In Him was the heroism of prophets and martyrs in supreme degree.

In Him was the strength of indwelling Divinity. He fought and conquered all man's enemies, routed sin, and triumphed over Death.

In the Cross we see divine power in operation in its noblest form, in its intensest energy, in its widest sweep, in its most magnificent result. He is able to save, to save all, to save any.

He is mighty to save, and is able to save unto the uttermost, because He lives for ever, and His power is eternal as Himself.

II. The mighty Saviour as to be manifested in the future.

Clearly the imagery of the context describes a tremendous act of judgment. And as clearly the Apocalyptic Seer understood this prophecy as not only pointing to Christ, but as to be fulfilled in the final act of judgment. He quotes its words when he paints his magnificent vision of the Conqueror riding forth on his white horse, with garments sprinkled with blood and treading the 'winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' And the vision is interpreted unmistakably when we read that, though this Conqueror had a name unknown to any but Himself, 'His name is called the

Word of God.' So the unity of person in the Word made flesh who dwelt among us, full of grace and of this Mighty One girt for battle, is taught.

Keeping fast hold of this clue, the contrast between the characteristics of the historical Jesus and of the rider on the white horse becomes solemn and full of warning. And the contrast between the errand of the historical Jesus and that of the Conqueror bids us ponder on the possibilities that may sleep in perfect love. We have to widen our conceptions, if we have thought of our Jesus only as love, and have thought of love as shallow, as most men do. We are sometimes told that these two pictures, that of the Christ of the Gospels and that of the Christ of the Apocalypse, are incapable of being fused together in one original. But they can be stereoscoped, if we may say so. And they must be, if we are ever to understand the greatness of His love or the terribleness of His judgments. 'The wrath of the Lamb' sounds an impossibility, but if we ponder it, we shall find depths of graciousness as well as of awe in it.

Let us learn that the righteous Judge is logically and chronologically the completion of the picture of the merciful Saviour. In this age there is a tendency to treat sin with too much pity and too little condemnation. And there is not a sufficiently firm grasp of the truth that divine love must be in irreconcilable antagonism with human sin, and can do nothing but chastise and smite it.

III. The saving purpose of even that destructive might.

Through the whole Old Testament runs the longing that God would 'awake' to smite evil.

The tragedy of the drowned hosts in the Red Sea, and

Miriam and her maidens standing with their timbrels and shrill song of triumph on the bank, is a prophecy of what shall be. 'Ye shall have a song as in the night a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goeth with a pipe to come unto the mountain of the Lord.' And at the thought of that solemn act of judgment they who love the Judge, and have long known Him, 'may lift up their heads' in the confidence that 'their redemption draweth nigh.' That is the last, and in some sense the mightiest, greatest act by which He shows Himself 'mighty to save His redeemed.'

So we may, like the prophet, see that swift form striding nearer and nearer, but, unlike the prophet, we need not to ask, 'Who is this that cometh?' for we have known Him from of old, and we remember the voice that said, 'This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.' 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.'

THE WINEPRESS AND ITS TREADER

'Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone.'—ISAIAH lxiii. 2, 3.

THE structure of these closing chapters is chronological, and this is the final scene. What follows is epilogue. The reference of this magnificent imagery to the sufferings of Jesus is a complete misapprehension. These sufferings were dealt with once for all in chapter liii., and it is Messiah triumphant who has filled the prophet's vision since then.

I. The treading of the winepress.

The nations are flung into the press, as ripe grapes.

The picture is plainly a figure of some tremendous judgment in which the powers that oppose the majestic march of the triumphant Messiah will be crushed and trampled to ruin. They are trodden 'in Mine anger, and their life-blood is sprinkled on My garments.' It is He who crushes, not He who is crushed. The winepress which He treads is the 'winepress of the wrath of Almighty God,' and His treading of it is His executing of God's judgments on those whose antagonism to Him and to His 'redeemed' has brought them within their sweep. The prophetic imagination kindles and casts its thought into that terrible picture, which some fastidious people would think coarse, of a peasant standing up to his knees in a vat heaped with purple clusters, and fiercely trampling them down, while the red juice splashes upon his girt-up clothes.

The prophet does not date his vision. It has been realised many a time, and will be many a time still. Wherever opposition to Christ and His kingdom has reached ripeness, wherever antagonistic tendencies have borne fruit which has matured, the winepress is set up and the treading begins. 'Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' 'Immediately he putteth in the sickle because the harvest is done.' The judgments tarry long, and Christ's servants, oppressed or hard pressed, get impatient, and cry 'How long, O Lord, dost Thou not judge? It is time for Thee to work.' But long patience precedes the divine awaking, for it is not God's way nor Christ's to cut down even a cumbering tree, until the possibility of its bearing fruit is plainly ended, and the last use that He makes of anything is to burn it. The repeated settings up of Christ's winepress have all been one in principle,

and they all point onwards to a final one. There have been many 'days of the Lord,' and if men were wise and 'observed these things,'—which most of them are not,—they would see that these lesser 'days' made a 'final great and terrible day of the Lord' supremely probable, and in perfect analogy with all that experience and history have testified as to the method of the divine government.

Surely it is strange that the groundless expectation of the unbroken continuance of the present order should be so strong that many should utterly ignore the truth taught by such teachers as these, and reiterated by science, which declares that the physical universe had a beginning and will have an end, and confirmed by Jesus Himself. There will come a to-morrow when the sun will *not* rise. There will come a to-morrow which will be '*the* day of the Lord,' of which all these earlier and partial epochs of judgment were but precursors and prophets.

II. The Treader of the Winepress.

The context clearly shows that, in the prophet's view, the suffering Messiah in His exalted royalty is the agent of this, as of all divine acts. He is clothed with majesty, and it is 'in His hand,' or through His agency, that all 'the pleasure of the Lord' is brought to pass. The contrast with the figure in chap. liii. is ever to be kept in view. The lowliness, the weales and bruises, the form without comeliness are gone, and for these we see a conqueror, glorious in apparel and striding onwards in conscious strength.

But the access of majesty does not imply the putting off of lowliness and meekness. There is much that is severe and terrible in the figure that rises here before

the prophet's vision, but both aspects equally belong to the glorified Christ, and that duality in His character makes each element more impressive. His long-suffering mercy and more than human tenderness do not hamper His arm when it is bared to smite; His judicial severity does not dam up the flow of His mercy and tenderness. When He was on earth, He wept over Jerusalem, but His tears did not hinder His pronouncing woe on the city. His love leads Him to warn before He smites, but it does not contradict His threatenings, nor augur our impunity. Nay rather, love compels Him to smite. And, more terrible still, it is His very love that smites most severely hearts that have rejected it and learn their folly and sin too late.

III. Why the winepress is trodden.

The context tells us. The triumphant figure, seen by the prophet striding onwards from Edom, answers the question as to His identity with, 'I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' Then the treading of the winepress, from which He is represented as coming, is regarded as an exemplification of both these characteristics. It is a great act of righteousness. It is a great act of salvation. Similarly, He is represented as having been moved to that destructive judgment by the 'vengeance' that burned in His heart, and by His seeing that there were none to help His 'redeemed.'

So, then, the destructive act is a manifestation of Righteousness, which in such a connection means retributive justice. Awe-inspiring as it may be, the thunderstorm brings relief to a world sweltering in a stagnant atmosphere, and each blinding flash freshens the air. 'When the wicked perish, there is shouting.' The destruction of some hoary evil that has long afflicted

humanity and blocked the progress of the kingdom which is 'righteousness and peace and joy,' is a good. Christ's 'terrible things' are all 'in righteousness,' and meant to set Him forth as 'the confidence of all the ends of the earth.' To clear His character and government from all suspicion of moral indifference, to demonstrate by facts which the blindest can see, that it is not all the same to Him whether men are good or bad, to write in great letters which, like the capitals on a map, stretch across a whole land, 'The Judge of all the earth shall do right'—surely these are worthy ends to move even the loving Christ to tread the winepress.

Further, His destructive judgments, however terrible, will always be accurately measured by righteousness. They are not outbursts of feeling; they are in exact correspondence with the evils that bring them down. The lava flows according to its own density and the lie of the land which it covers. These judgments are deformed by no undue severity; no base elements of temper, no errors as to the degree of criminality mar them. They are calm and absolutely accurate judgments of Him who is not only just but Justice.

But the context further teaches us that the true point of view from which to regard Christ's treading of the winepress is to think of it as redemptive and contributory to the salvation of 'My redeemed.' Therefore there follows immediately on this picture of the conqueror treading the peoples in His fury and pouring their life-blood on the earth, the song of the delivered. Up through the troubled air, heavy with thunder-clouds, soars their praise, as a lark might rise and pour its strains above a volcano in eruption—'I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord,

according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He hath bestowed on them, according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.' Pharaoh is drowned in the Red Sea; Miriam and her maidens on the bank clash their cymbals, and lift shrill voices in their triumphant hymn. Babylon sinks like a millstone in the great waters—'and I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, Hallelujah; salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and righteous are His judgments.' The innermost impulse of judgment is love.

THE SYMPATHY OF GOD

'In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them.'—ISAIAH lxiii. 9.

I. THE wonderful glimpse opened here into the heart of God.

It is not necessary to touch upon the difference between the text and margin of the Revised Version, or to enter on the reason for preferring the former. And what a deep and wonderful thought that is, of divine sympathy with human sorrow! We feel that this transcends the prevalent tone of the Old Testament. It is made the more striking by reason of the other sides of the divine nature which the Old Testament gives so strongly; as, for instance, the unapproachable elevation and absolute sovereignty of God, and the retributive righteousness of God.

Affliction is His chastisement, and is ever righteously inflicted. But here is something more, tender and strange. Sympathy is a necessary part of love. There

is no true affection which does not put itself in the place and share the sorrows of its objects. And His sympathy is none the less because He inflicts the sorrow. These afflictions wherein He too was afflicted, were sent by Him. Like an earthly father who suffers more than the child whom he chastises, the Heavenly Father feels the strokes that He inflicts.

That sympathy is consistent with the blessedness of God. Even in the pain of our human sympathy there is a kind of joy, and we may be sure that in His nature there is nothing else.

Contrast with other thoughts about God.

The vague agnosticism of the present day, which knows only a dim Something of which we can predicate nothing.

The God of the philosophers—whom we are bidden to think of as passionless and unemotional. No wave of feeling ever ripples that tideless sea. The attribute of infinitude or sovereign completeness is dwelt on with such emphasis as to obscure all the rest.

The gods of men's own creation are careless in their happiness, and cruel in their vengeance. But here is a God for all the weary and the sorrowful. What a thought for us in our own burdened days!

II. The mystery of the divine salvation.

Of course the salvation here spoken of is the deliverance from Egyptian bondage. This is a summary of the Exodus. But we must mark well that significant expression, 'the angel of His face' or 'presence.' We can only attempt a partial and bald enumeration of some of the very remarkable references to that mysterious person, 'the angel of the Lord' or 'of the presence.' The dying Jacob ascribed his being 'redeemed from all evil'

to 'the Angel,' and invoked his blessing on 'the lads.' '*The* angel of the Lord' appeared to Moses out of the midst of the burning bush. On Sinai, Jehovah promised to send an 'angel' in whom was His own name, before the people. The promise was renewed after Israel's sin and repentance, and was then given in the form, '*My* presence shall go with thee.' Joshua saw a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who declared himself to be the Captain of the Lord's host. 'The angel of the Lord' appeared to Manoah and his wife, withheld his name from them because it was 'wonderful' or 'secret,' accepted their sacrifice, and went up to heaven in its flame. Wherefore Manoah said, 'We have seen God.' Long after these early visions, a psalmist knows himself safe because 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.' Hosea, looking back on the story of Jacob's wrestling at Peniel, says, first, that 'he had power with *God*, yea, he had power over the *angel*,' and then goes on to say that 'there He spake with us, even *Jehovah*.' And Malachi, on the last verge of Old Testament prophecy, goes furthest of all in seeming to run together the conceptions of Jehovah and the Angel of Jehovah, for he says, 'The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple; and the angel of the covenant . . . behold, *he* cometh.' From this imperfect *résumé*, we see that there appears in the earliest as in the latest books of the Old Testament, a person distinguished from the hosts of angels, identified in a very remarkable manner with Jehovah, by alternation of names, in attributes and offices, and in receiving worship, and being the organ of His revelation. That special relation to the divine revelation is expressed by both the representation that 'Jehovah's name is in him,' and

by the designation in our text, 'the angel of His presence,' or literally, 'of His face.' For 'name' and 'face' are in so far synonymous that they mean the side of the divine nature which is turned to the world.

For the present I go no further than this. It is clear, then, that our text is at all events remarkable, in that it ascribes to this 'angel of His presence' the praise of Jehovah's saving work. The loving heart, afflicted in all their afflictions, sends forth the messenger of His face, and by Him is salvation wrought. The whole sum of the deliverance of Israel in the past is attributed to Him. Surely this must have been felt by a devout Jew to conceal some great mystery.

III. The crowning revelation both of the heart of God and of His saving power.

(*a*) Jesus Christ is the true 'angel of the face.'

I do not need to enter on the question of whether in the Old Testament the angel of the Covenant was indeed a pre-manifestation of the eternal Son. I am disposed to answer it in the affirmative. But be that as it may, all that was spoken of the angel is true of Him. God's name is in Him, and that not in fragments or half-syllables but complete. The face of God looks lovingly on men in Him, so that Jesus could declare, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' His presence brings God's presence, and He can venture to say, '*We* will come and make our abode with Him.' He is the agent of the divine salvation.

The identity and the difference are here in their highest form.

(*b*) The mystery of God's sharing our sorrows is explained in Him.

We may find a difficulty in the thought of a suffering

and sympathising God. But if we believe that 'My name is in Him,' then the sympathy and gentleness of Jesus is the compassion of God. This is a true revelation. So tears at the grave sighs in healing, and all the sorrows which He bore are an unveiling of the heart of God.

That sharing our sorrows is the very heart of His work. We might almost say that He became man in order to increase His power of sympathy, as a prince might temporarily become a pauper. But certainly He became man that He might bear our burdens. 'Himself took our infirmities.' 'Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He himself also likewise took part of the same.'

The atoning death is the climax of Christ's being afflicted with our afflictions. His priestly sympathy flows out now and for ever to us all.

So complete is His unity with God, that He works the salvation which is God's, and that God's name is in Him. So complete is His union with us, that our sorrows touch Him and His life becomes ours. 'Ye have done it unto Me.' 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?'

For us in all our troubles there are no darker rooms than Christ has been in before us. We are like prisoners put in the same cell as some great martyr. He drank the cup, and we can put the rim to our lips at the place that His lips have touched. But not only may we have our sufferings lightened by the thought that He has borne the same, and that we know the 'fellowship of Christ's sufferings,' but we have the further alleviation of being sure that He makes our afflictions His by perfect sympathy, and, still more wonderful and blessed, that there is such unity of life and sensation between the

Head and the members that our afflictions *are* His, and are not merely made so.

'Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Saviour is not by;
Think not thou canst shed a tear
And thy Saviour is not near.'

Do not front the world alone. *In* all our afflictions He is with us; *out of* them all He saves.

HOW TO MEET GOD

'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember Thee in Thy ways.'—ISAIAH lxiv. 5.

THE prophet here shows us how there is a great staircase which we ourselves build, which leads straight from earth to heaven, and how we can secure that we shall meet with God and God with us. 'Isaiah' is often called the evangelical prophet. He is so, not only because of his predictions of the suffering Servant of Jehovah which are 'fulfilled' in Christ, but because his conceptions of the religious life tremble on the very verge of the full-orbed teaching of the New Testament. In these ancient words of my text, in very different phraseology indeed, we see a strikingly accurate and full anticipation of the very central teaching of Paul and his brother apostles, as to the way by which God and man come into union with one another. 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth'; that joy is to be manifested by 'working righteousness,' but the joy which is the parent of righteousness is the child of something else—'those that remember Thee in Thy ways.' If we ponder these words, and carefully mark their relation to each other, we may discern, as it were, a great staircase with three flights in it, and at the top God's face.

We have to begin with the last clause of our text—

'Thou meetest him . . . that remembers Thee in Thy ways.'

The first stage on the road which will bring any man into, and keep any man in, contact with God, and loving fellowship with Him, is the contemplation of His character as it is made known to us by His acts. God, like man, is known by His 'fruits.' You cannot get at a clear conception of God by speculation, or by thinking about Him or about what He is in Himself. Lay hold of the clue of His acts, and it leads you straight into His heart. But the act of acts, in which the whole Godhead concurs, in which all its depths and preciousness are concentrated, like wine in a golden cup, is the incarnation and life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord. There, and not in the thoughts of our own hearts nor the tremors of our own consciences, nor in the enigmatical witness of Providence—which is enigmatical until it is interpreted in the ligth of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion—there we see most clearly the 'ways' of God, the beaten, trodden path by which He is wont to come forth out of the thick darkness into which no speculation can peer an inch, and walk amongst men. The cross of Christ, and, subordinately, His other dealings with us, as interpreted thereby, is the 'way of the Lord,' from everlasting to everlasting. And it is by a loving gaze upon that 'way' that we learn to know Him for what He is. It is there, and there only, that the thick darkness passes into glorious light. It is at that point alone that the closed circle of the Infinite nature of Deity opens so as that a man can press into the very centre of the glory, and feel himself at home in the blaze. It is 'those that remember Thee in Thy ways,' and especially in that way of righteousness and peace, the way of the cross—it is they who have

built the first flight of the solemn staircase that leads up from the lownesses and darknesses of earth into the loftinesses and lights of heaven.

But note that word 'Remember,' for it suggests the warning that such contemplation of the ways of the Lord will not be realised by us without effort. We shall forget, assuredly, unless we earnestly try to 'remember.' There are so many things within us to draw us away, the duties, and the joys, and the sorrows of life so insist upon having a place in our hearts and thoughts, that assuredly, unless by resolute effort, frequently repeated, we clear a space in this crowded and chattering market-place, where we can stand and gaze on the white summits far beyond the bustling crowd, we shall never see them, though they are visible from every place. Unless you try to remember, you will certainly forget.

Many voices preach to-day many duties for Christians. Let me plead for times of quiet, for times of 'doing' nothing, for fruitful times of growth, for times when we turn all the rout and rabble of earthly things, and even the solemn company of pressing duties, out of our hearts and thoughts, and shut up ourselves alone with God. Be sure you will never build even the first step of the staircase unless you know what it is to go into the secret place of the Most High, and, alone with God, to summon to 'the sessions of sweet, silent thought' His ways, and especially Him who is 'the Way,' both of God to us, and of us to God.

Now, the second flight of this great staircase is pointed out in the first clause of my text: 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth.'

That meditative remembrance of the ways of God will be the parent of holy joy which will bring God near to

our heart. Alas! it is too often the very opposite of true that men's joys are such as to bring God to them. The excitement, and often the impure elements, that mingle with what the world calls 'joy,' are such as to shut Him out from us. But there is a gladness which comes from the contemplation of Him as He is, and as He is known by His 'ways' to be, which brings us very near to God, and God very near to us. It is that joy which was spoken of in an earlier part of this context: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation.' Here, then, is the second stage—gladness, deep, pure, based upon the contemplation of God's character as manifested in His work. I do not think that the ordinary type of modern Christianity is half joyful enough. And I think that we have largely lost the very thought that gladness is a plain Christian *duty*, to be striven after in the appropriate manner which my text suggests, and certainly to be secured if we seek it in the right way. We all know how outward cares, and petty annoyances, and crushing sorrows, and daily anxieties, and the tear and wear of work, and our own restlessness and ungovernableness, and the faults that still haunt our lives, and sometimes make us feel as if our Christianity was all a sham—how all these things are at enmity with joy in God. But in face of them all, I would echo the old grand words of the epistle of gladness written by the apostle in prison, and within hail of his death: 'Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice.' Recognise it as your duty to be glad, and if it is hard to be so, ask yourselves whether you are doing what will make you so, remembering 'Thee in Thy ways.' That is the second flight of the staircase.

The third stage is working righteousness because of such joy. 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and'—because he does—'worketh righteousness.' Every master knows how much more work can be got out of a servant who works with a cheery heart than out of one that is driven reluctantly to his task. You remember our Lord's parable where He traces idleness to fear: 'I knew thee that thou wast an austere man, gathering where thou didst not strew, and I was afraid, and I went and hid thy talent.' No work was got out of that servant because there was no joy in him. The opposite state of mind—diligence in righteous work, inspired by gladness which in its turn is inspired by the remembrance of God's ways—is the mark of a true servant of God. The prophet's words have the germ of the full New Testament doctrine that the first step to all practical obedience and righteous living is the recognition of the great truth of Christ's death for us on the Cross; that the second step is the acceptance of that great work, and the gladness that comes from the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God, and that the issue of both these things, the preached gospel and the faith that grasps it and the love by which the faith is followed, is obedience, instinct with willingness and buoyant with joyfulness, and therefore tending to be perfect in degree and in kind. The work that is worth doing, the work which God regards as 'righteous,' comes, and comes only, from the motives of 'remembering Thee in Thy ways,' and rejoicing because we do remember.

And the gladness which is wholesome and blessed, and is 'joy in the Lord,' will manifest itself by efflorescing into all holiness and all loftiness and largeness of obedience. You may try to frighten men into righteous-

ness, you will never succeed. You may try to coerce their wills, and your strongest bands will be broken as the iron chains were by the demoniac. But put upon them the silken leash of love, and you may lead them where you will. You cannot grow grapes on an iceberg, and you cannot get works of righteousness out of a man that has a dread of God at the back of his heart, killing all its joy. But let the spring sunshine come, and then all the frost-bound earth opens and softens, and the tender green spikelets push themselves up through the brown soil, and in due time come 'the blade, and the ear, and the full corn in the ear.' Isaiah anticipated Paul when he said, 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.'

Lastly, we have the landing-place to which the stair leads. God comes to such a man. He meets him indeed at all the stages, for there is a blessed communion with God, that springs immediately from remembering Him in His ways, and a still more blessed one that springs from rejoicing in His felt friendship and Fatherhood, and a yet more blessed one that comes from practical righteousness. For if there is anything that breaks our communion with God, it is that there linger in our lives evils which make it impossible for God and us to come close together. The thinnest film of a non-conductor will stop the flow of the strongest electric current, and an almost imperceptible film of self-will and evil, dropped between oneself and God, will make a barrier impermeable except by that divine Spirit who worketh upon a man's heart and who may thin away the film through his repentance, and then the Father and the prodigal embrace. 'Thou meetest him,' not only 'that worketh righteousness,' but that hates his sin.

Only remember, if there is the practice of evil, there cannot be the sunshine of the Presence of God. But remember, too, that the commonest, homeliest, smallest, most secular tasks may become the very highest steps of the staircase that brings us into His Presence. If we go about our daily work, however wearisome and vulgar and commonplace it often seems to us, and make it a work of righteousness resting on the joy of salvation, and that reposing on the contemplation of God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, our daily work may bring us as close to God as if we dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and the market and the shop may be a temple where we meet with Him.

Dear brethren, there are two kinds of meeting God: 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness,' and that is blessed, as when Christ met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. There is another kind of meeting with God. 'Who, making war, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?'

'THE GOD OF THE AMEN'

'He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth.' —Isaiah lxv. 16.

The full beauty and significance of these remarkable words are only reached when we attend to the literal rendering of a part of them which is obscured in our version. As they stand in the original they have, in both cases, instead of the vague expression, 'The God of truth,' the singularly picturesque one, 'The God of the Amen.'

I. Note the meaning of the name. Now, *Amen* is an adjective, which means literally firm, true, reliable, or the like. And, as we know, its liturgical use is that, in the olden time, and to some extent in the present time, it was the habit of the listening people to utter it at the close of prayer or praise. But besides this use at the end of some one else's statement, which the sayer of the 'Amen' confirms by its utterance, we also find it used at the beginning of a statement, by the speaker, in order to confirm his own utterance by it.

And these two uses of the expression reposing on its plain meaning, in the first instance signifying, 'I tell you that it is so'; and in the second instance signifying, 'So may it be!' or, 'So we believe it is,' underlie this grand title which God takes to Himself here, 'the God of the Amen,' both His Amen and ours. So that the thought opens up very beautifully and simply into these two, His truth and our faith.

First, it emphasises the absolute truthfulness of every word that comes from His lips. There is implied in the title that He really *has* spoken, and declared to man something of His will, something of His nature, something of His purposes, something of our destiny. And now He puts, as it were, the broad seal upon the charter and says, 'Amen! Verily it is so, and My word of Revelation is no man's imagination, and My word of command is the absolute unveiling of human duty and human perfectness, and My word of promise is that upon which a man may rest all his weight and be safe for ever.' God's word is 'Amen!' man's word is 'perhaps.' For in regard to the foundation truths of man's belief and experience and need, no human tongue can venture to utter its own asseverations with nothing be-

hind them but itself, and expect men to accept them; but that is exactly what God does, and alone has the right to do. His word absolutely, and through and through, in every fibre of it, is reliable and true.

Now do not forget that there was one who came to us and said, 'Amen! Amen! I say unto you.' Jesus Christ, in all His deep and wonderful utterances, arrogated to Himself the right which God here declares to be exclusively His, and He said, 'I too have, and I too exercise, the right and the authority to lay My utterances down before you, and expect you to take them because of nothing else than because I say them.' God is the God of the Amen! The last book of Scripture, when it draws back the curtain from the mysteries of the glorified session of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, makes Him say to us, 'These things saith the Amen!' And if you want to know what that means, its explanation follows in the next clause, 'the faithful and true witness.'

But then, on the other hand, necessarily involved in this title, though capable of being separately considered, is not only the absolute truthfulness of the divine word, but also the thorough-going reliance, on our parts, which that word expects and demands. God's 'Amen,' and 'Verily,' of confirmation, should ever cause the 'Amen' of acceptance and assent to leap from our lips. If He begins with that mighty word, so soon as the solemn voice has ceased its echo should rise from our hearts. The city that cares for the charter which its King has given it will prepare a fitting, golden receptacle in which to treasure it. And the men who believe that God in very deed has spoken laws that illuminate, and commandments that guide, and promises that calm

and strengthen and fulfil themselves, will surely prepare in their hearts an appropriate receptacle for those precious and infallible words. God's truth has corresponding to it our trust. God's faithfulness demands, and is only adequately met by, our faith. If He gives us the sure foundation to build upon, it will be a shame for us to bring wood, hay, stubble, and build these upon the Rock of Ages. The building should correspond with its foundation, and the faith which grasps the sure word should have in it something of the unchangeableness and certainty and absoluteness of that word which it grasps. If His revelation of Himself is certain, you and I ought to be certain of His revelation of Himself. Our certitude should correspond to its certainty.

Ah! my friend, what a miserable contrast there is between the firm, unshaken, solid security of the divine word upon which we say that we trust, and the poor, feeble, broken trust which we build upon it. 'Let not that man think that He shall receive anything of the Lord'; but let us expect, as well as 'ask, in faith, nothing wavering'; and let our 'Amen!' ring out in answer to God's.

The Apostle Paul has a striking echo of the words of my text in the second Epistle to the Corinthians: 'All the promises of God in Him are yea! and through Him also is the Amen!' The assent, full, swift, frank—the assent of the believing heart to the great word of God comes through the same channel, and reaches God by the same way, as God's word on which it builds comes to us. The 'God of the Amen,' in both senses of the word, is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the seal as well as the substance of the divine promises, and whose voice in us is the answer to, and

the grasp of, the promises of which He is the substance and soul.

II. Now notice, next, how this God of the Amen is, by reason of that very characteristic, the source of all blessing.

'He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of Truth.' That phrase of *blessing oneself in*, which is a frequent Old Testament expression, is roughly equivalent to invoking, and therefore receiving, blessing from. You find it, for instance, in the seventy-second Psalm, in that grand burst which closes one of the books of the Psalter and hails the coming of the Messianic times, of which my text also is a prediction. 'Men shall be blessed in Him,' or rather, 'shall bless themselves in Him,' which is a declaration, that all needful benediction shall come down upon humanity through the coming Messias, as well as that men shall recognise in that Messias the source of all their blessing and good. So the text declares that, in those days that are yet to come, the whole earth shall be filled with men whose eyes have been purged from ignorance and sin, and from the illusions of sense and the fascinations of folly, and who have learned that only in the God of the Amen is the blessing of their life to be found.

Of course it is so. For only on Him can I lean all my weight and be sure that the stay will not give. All other bridges across the great abysses which we have to traverse or be lost in them, are like those snow-cornices upon some Alp, which may break when the climber is on the very middle of them, and let him down into blackness out of which he will never struggle. There is only one path clear across the deepest gulf, which we poor pilgrims can tread with absolute safety that it will never

yield beneath our feet. My brother! there is one support that is safe, and one stay upon which a man can lean his whole weight and be sure that the staff will never either break or pierce his palm, and that is the faithful God, in whose realm are no disappointments, amongst whose trusters are no heart-broken and deceived men, but who gives bountifully, and over and above all that we are able to ask or think. They who have made experience, as we have all made experience, of the insufficiency of earthly utterances, of the doubtfulness of the clearest words of men, of the possible incapacity of the most loving, to be what they pledge themselves to be, and of the certainty that even if they are so for a while they cannot be so always—have surely learned one half, at least, of the lesson that life is meant to teach us; and it is our own fault if we have not bettered it with the better half, having uncoiled the tendrils of our hearts from the rotten props round which they have been too apt to twine themselves, and wreathed them about the pillars of the eternal throne, which can never shake nor fail. 'He that blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself'—unless he is a fool—'in the God of the Amen!' and not in the *man* of the 'peradventure.'

III. Lastly, note how the God of the Amen should be the pattern of His servants.

'He that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth,' or, 'of the Amen.' The prophet deduces from the name the solemn thought that those who truly feel its significance will shape *their* words accordingly, and act and speak so that they shall not fear to call His pure eyes to witness that there are neither hypocrisy, nor insincerity, nor vacillation, nor the 'hidden things of dishonesty,' nor any of the skulking meannesses of craft

and self-seeking in them. 'I swear by the God of the Amen, and call Thy faithfulness to witness that I am trying to be like Thee,' that is what we ought to do if we call ourselves Christians. If we have any hold at all of Him, and of His love, and of the greatness and majesty of His faithfulness, we shall try to make our poor little lives, in such measure as the dewdrops may be like the sun, radiant like His, and of the same shape as His, for the dewdrop and the sun are both of them spheres. That is exactly what the apostle does, in that same chapter in 2 Cor., to which I already referred. He takes these very thoughts of my text, and in their double aspect too, and says, 'Just because God is faithful, do you Corinthians think that, when I told you that I was coming to see you, I did not mean it?' He brings the greatest thought that He can find about God and God's truth, down to the settlement of this very little matter, the vindication of Himself from the charge, on the one hand, of facile and inconsiderate vacillation, and, on the other hand, of insincerity. So, we may say, the greatest thoughts should regulate the smallest acts. Though our maps be but a quarter of an inch to a hundred miles, let us see that they are drawn to scale. Let us see that He is our Pattern; and that the truthfulness, the simplicity, and faithfulness, which we rest upon as the very foundation of our intellectual as well as our moral and religious being, are, in our measure, copied in ourselves. 'As God is faithful,' said Paul, 'our word to you was not yea! and nay!' And they who are trusting to the God of the Amen! will live in all simplicity and godly sincerity; their yea will be yea, and their nay, nay.

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

GOD'S LAWSUIT

'Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead.'—JER. ii. 9.

POINT out that 'plead' is a forensic term. There is a great lawsuit in which God is plaintiff and men defendants. The word is frequent in Isaiah.

I. The reason for God's pleading.

The cause—'wherefore.' Our transgression does not make Him turn away from us. It does profoundly modify the whole relation between us. It does give an aspect of antagonism to His dealings.

II. The manner.

The whole history of the world and of each individual. All outward providences. All the voice of Conscience. Christ. Spirit, who convinces the world of Sin.

III. The purpose.

Wholly our being drawn from our evil. The purely reformatory character of all punishment here. The sole object to win us back to Himself. He conquers in this lawsuit when we come to love Him.

IV. The patience.

That merciful pleading—'I will *yet*'—runs on through all sin, and is only made more earnest by deepening hostility. After rejections still lingers. Extends over a thousand generations. Is exercised even where He foresees failure.

STIFF-NECKED IDOLATERS AND PLIABLE CHRISTIANS

'Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.'—JER. ii. 11.

THE obstinacy of the adherents of idolatry is in striking contrast with Israel's continual tendency to forsake Jehovah. It reads a scarcely less forcible lesson to many nominal and even to some real Christians.

I. That contrast carries with it a disclosure of the respective origins of the two kinds of Religion.

The strangeness of the contrasted conduct is intensified when we take into account the tremendous contrast between the two Objects of worship. Israel's God was Israel's 'Glory'; the idol-worshipper bowed down before 'that which doth not profit,' and yet no experience of God could bind His fickle worshippers to Him, and no experience of the impotence of the idol could shake its votaries' devotion. They cried and were not heard. They toiled and had no results. They broke their teeth on 'that which is not bread,' and filled their mouths with gritty ashes that mocked them with a semblance of nourishment and left them with empty stomachs and excoriated gums, yet by some strange hallucination they clung to 'vanities,' while Israel was always hankering after opportunity to desert Jehovah. The stage of civilisation partly accounts for the strange fascination of idolatry over the Israelites. But the deeper solution lies in the fact that the one religion rises from the hearts of men, corresponds to their moral condition, and is largely moulded by their lower nature; while the other is from above, corresponds, indeed, with the best and deepest longings and needs of souls, but contravenes many of

their most clamant wishes, and necessarily sets before them a standard high and difficult to reach. Men make their gods in their own image, and are conscious of no rebuke nor stimulus to loftier living when they gaze on them. The God of Revelation bids men remake themselves in His image, and that command requires endless effort. The average man has to put a strain on his intellect in order to rise to the apprehension of God, and a still more unwelcome strain on his moral nature to rise to the imitation of God. No wonder, then, if the dwellers on the low levels should cleave to them, and the pilgrims to the heights should often weary of their toil and be distressed with the difficulty of breathing the thin air up there, and should give up climbing and drop down to the flats once more.

II. That contrast carries with it a rebuke.

Many voices echo the prophet's contrast nowadays. Our travelling countrymen, especially those of them who have no great love for earnest religion, are in the habit of drawing disparaging contrasts between Buddhists, Brahmins, Mohammedans, any worshippers of other gods and Christians. One may not uncharitably suspect that a more earnest Christianity would not please these critics much better than does the tepid sort, and that the pictures they draw both of heathenism and of Christianity are coloured by their likes and dislikes. But it is well to learn from an enemy, and caricatures may often be useful in calling attention to features which would escape notice but for exaggeration. So we may profit by even the ill-natured and distorted likenesses of ourselves as contrasted with the adherents of other religions which so many 'liberal-minded' writers of travels delight to supply.

Think, then, of the rebuke which the obstinate adherence of idolators to their idols gives to the slack hold which so many professing Christians have on their religion.

Think of the way in which these lower religions pervade the whole life of their worshippers, and of how partial is the sway over a little territory of life and conduct which Christianity has in many of its adherents. The absorption in worship shown by Mohammedans, who will spread their prayer carpets anywhere and perform their drill of prayers without embarrassment or distraction in the sight of a crowd, or the rapt 'devotion' of fakirs, are held up as a rebuke to us 'Christians' who are ashamed to be caught praying. One may observe, in mitigation, that the worship which is of the heart is naturally more sensitive to surrounding distractions than that which is a matter of posturing and repetition by rote. But there still remains substance enough in the contrast to point a sharp arrow of rebuke.

And there is no denying that in these 'heathen' religions, religion is intertwined with every act of life in a fashion which may well put to shame many of us. Remember how Paul had to deal at length with the duty of the Corinthians in view of the way in which every meal was a sacrifice to some god, and how the same permeation of life with religion is found in all these 'false faiths.' The octopus has coiled its tentacles round the whole body of its victim. Bad and sad and mad as idolatry is, it reads a rebuke to many of us, who keep life and religion quite apart, and lock up our Christianity in our pews with our prayer-books and hymnaries.

Think of the material sacrifices made by idolators, in costly offerings, in painful self-tortures, and in many

other ways, and the niggardliness and self-indulgence of so many so-called Christians.

III. The contrast suggests the greatness of the power which can overcome even such obstinate adherence to idols.

There is one, and only one, solvent for that rock-like obstinacy—the Gospel. The other religions have seldom attempted to encroach on each other's territory, and where they have, their instrument of conversion has generally been the sword. The Gospel has met and mastered them all. It, and it only, has had power to draw men to itself out of every faith. The ancient gods who bewitched Israel, the gods of Greece, the gods of our own ancestors, the gods of the islands of the South Seas, lie huddled together, in undistinguished heaps, like corpses on a battlefield, and the deities of India and the East are wounded and slowly bleeding out their lives. 'Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, the idols are upon the beasts,' all packed up, as it were, and ready to be carried off.

The rate of progress in dethroning them varies with the varying national conditions. It is easier to cut a tunnel through chalk than through quartz.

IV. That contrast carries with it a call for Christian effort to spread the conquering Gospel.

FOUNTAIN AND CISTERNS

'They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.'—JER. ii. 13.

THE proclivity of the Jews to idolatry is an outstanding fact all through their history. That persistent national tendency surely compels us to recognise a divine inspiration as the source of the prophetic teaching and of the

lofty spiritual theology of the Old Testament, which were in sharpest unlikeness and opposition to the whole trend of the people's thoughts.

It is this apostasy which is referred to here. The false gods made by men are the broken cisterns. But the text embodies a general truth.

I. The irksomeness of a godless life.

The contrast is between the springing fountain, there in the desert, with the lush green herbage round about, where a man has only to stoop and drink, and the painful hewing of cisterns.

This emblem of the fountain beautifully suggests the great thought of God's own loving will as the self-originated impulse by which He pours out all good. Apart from all our efforts, the precious gift is provided for us. Our relation is only that of receivers.

We have the contrast with this in the laborious toils to which they condemn themselves who seek for created sources of good. 'Hewn out cisterns'—think of a man who, with a fountain springing in his courtyard, should leave it and go to dig in the arid desert, or to hew the live rock in hopes to gain water. It was already springing and sparkling before him. The conduct of men, when they leave God and seek for other delights, is like digging a canal alongside a navigable river. They condemn themselves to a laborious and quite superfluous task. The true way to get is to take.

Illustrations in religion. Think of the toil and pains spent in idolatry and in corrupt forms of Christianity.

Illustrations in common life. Your toils—aye, and even your pleasures—how much of them is laboriously digging for the water which all the while is flowing at your side.

II. The hopelessness of a godless life.

The contrast further is between living waters and broken cisterns. God is the fountain of living waters; in other words, in fellowship with God there is full satisfaction for all the capacities and desires of the soul; heart —conscience—will—understanding—hope and fear.

The contrast of the empty cisterns. What a deep thought that with all their work men only make 'cisterns,' *i.e.* they only provide circumstances which *could hold* delights, but cannot secure that water should be in them! The men-made cisterns must be God-filled, if filled at all. The true joys from earthly things belong to him who has made God his portion.

Further, they are 'broken cisterns,' and all have in them some flaw or crack out of which the water runs. That is a vivid metaphor for the fragmentary satisfaction which all earthly good gives, leaving a deep yearning unstilled. And it is temporary as well as partial. 'He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again'—nay, even as with those who indulge in intoxicating drinks, the appetite increases while the power of the draught to satisfy it diminishes. But the crack in the cistern points further to the uncertain tenure of all earthly goods and the certain leaving of them all.

All godless life is a grand mistake.

III. The crime of a godless life.

It is right to seek for happiness. It is sin to go away from God. You are thereby not merely flinging away your chances, but are transgressing against your sacredest obligations. Our text is not only a remonstrance on the grounds of prudence, showing God-neglecting men that they are foolish, but it is an appeal to conscience, convincing them that they are sinful. God

loves us and cares for us. We are bound to Him by ties which do not depend on our own volition. And so there is punishment for the sin, and the evils experienced in a godless life are penal as well as natural.

We recall the New Testament modification of this metaphor, 'The water that I shall give him shall be *in* him a fountain of water.' Arabs in desert round dried-up springs. Hagar. Shipwrecked sailors on a reef. Christ opens 'rivers in the wilderness and streams in the desert.'

FORSAKING JEHOVAH

'Know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.'—JER. ii. 19.

OF course the original reference is to national apostasy, which was aggravated by the national covenant, and avenged by national disasters, which are interpreted and urged by the prophet as God's merciful pleading with men. But the text is true in reference to individuals.

I. The universal indictment.

This is not so much a charge of isolated overt acts, as of departure from God. That departure, itself a sin, is the fountain of all other sins. Every act which is morally wrong is religiously a departure from God; it could not be done, unless heart and will had moved away from their allegiance to Him. So the solemn mystery of right and wrong becomes yet more solemn, when our personal relation to the personal God is brought in.

Then—consider what this forsaking is—at bottom aversion of will, or rather of the whole nature, from Him.

How strange and awful is that power which a creature possesses of closing his heart against God, and setting up a quasi-independence!

How universal it is—appeal to each man's own consciousness.

II. The special aggravation.

'*Thy* God'—the original reference is to Israel, whom God had taken for His and to whom He had given Himself as theirs, by His choice from of old, by redemption from Egypt, by covenant, and by centuries of blessings. But the designation is true in regard to God and each of us. It points to the personal relation which we each sustain to Him, and so is a pathetic appeal to affection and gratitude.

III. The bitter fruit.

'Evil' may express rather the moral character of forsaking God, while 'bitter' expresses rather the consequences of it, which are sorrows.

So the prophet appeals to experience. As the Psalmist confidently invites to 'taste and see that God is good,' so Jeremiah boldly bids the apostates know and see that departing is bitter.

It is so, for it leaves the soul unsatisfied.

It leads to remorse.

It drags after it manifold bitter fruits. 'The wages of sin is death.'

Sin without consequent sorrow is an impossibility if there is a God.

IV. The loving appeal.

The text is not denunciation, but tender, though indignant, pleading, in hope of winning back the wanderers. The prophet has just been pointing to the sorrowful results which necessarily follow on the nation's apostasy, and

tells Israel that 'its own wickedness shall correct it,' and then, in the text, he beseeches them not to be blind to the meaning of their miseries, but to let these teach them how sinful and how sorrowful their apostasy is. Men's sorrows are a mystery, but that sinners should not have sorrows were a sadder mystery still. And God pleads with us all not to lose the good of our experiences of the bitterness of sin by our levity or our blindness to their meaning. By His providences, by His Spirit working on us, by the plain teachings and loving pleadings of His word, He is ever striving to open our eyes that we may see Good and Evil, and recognise that all Good is bound up for us with cleaving to God, and all Evil with departing from Him. When we turn our backs on Him we are full front with the deformed figure of Evil; when we turn away from it, we are face to face with Him, and in Him, with all Good.

A COLLOQUY BETWEEN A PENITENT AND GOD

'A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God.'—JER. iii. 21, 22.

WE have here a brief dramatic dialogue. First is heard a voice from the bare heights, the sobs and cries of penitence, produced by the prophet's earnest remonstrance. The penitent soul is absorbed in the thought of its own evil. Its sin stands clear before it. Israel sees its sin in its two forms. 'They have perverted their way,' or have led a wrong outward life of action, and the reason is that 'they have forgotten God,' or

have been guilty of inward alienation and departure from Him. Here is the consciousness of sin in its essential character, and that produces godly sorrow. The distinction between mere remorse and repentance is here already, in the 'weeping and supplication.'

I. So we have here a consciousness of sin in its true nature, as embracing both deeds and heart, as originating in departure from God, and manifested in perverted conduct.

Further, we have here sorrow. There may be consciousness of sin in its true nature without any sorrow of heart. It is fatal when a man looks upon his evil, gets a more or less clear sight of it, and is not sorry and penitent. It is conceivable that there should be perfect knowledge of sin and perfect insensibility in regard to it.

A sinful man's true mood should be sorrow—not flinging the blame on others, or on fate, or circumstances; not regarding his sin as misfortune or as inevitable or as disease.

Conscience is meant to produce that consciousness and that sorrow: but conscience may be dulled or silenced. It cannot be anyhow induced to call evil good, but it may be mistaken in what is evil. The gnomon is true, but a veil of cloud may be drawn over the sky.

Further, we have here supplication. These two former may both be experienced, without this third. There may be consciousness of sin and sorrow which lead to no blessing. 'My bones waxed old through my roaring.' Sorrow after a godly sort may be hindered by false notions of God's great love, or by false notions of what a man ought to do when he finds he has gone wrong. It may be hindered by cleaving, subtle love of sin, or by

self-trust. But where all these have been overcome there is true repentance.

II. The loving divine answer.

Another ear than the prophet's has heard the plaint from the bare heights. Many a frenzied shriek had gone up from these shrines of idolatrous worship, and as with Baal's prophets, it had brought no answer, nor had there been any that regarded. But this weeping reaches the ear that is never closed. Contrast with verse 23: 'Truly in vain is the help that is looked for from the hills, the shouting (of idol-worshippers) on the mountains.'

The instantaneousness of God's answer is very beautiful. It is like the action of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, who saw his repentant boy afar off and ran and kissed him.

There seems to be, in both the invitation to return and in the promise to hear the backslidings, a quotation from Hosea xiv. (1–4). We see here how God meets the penitent with a love that recognises all his sin and yet is love. It is not rebuke or reproach that lies in that designation, 'backsliding children.' It is tenderest mercy that lets us see that He knows exactly what we are, and yet promises His love and forgiveness. He loves us sinners with a love that beckons us back to Himself, with a love that promises healing. The truth which should be taken into the mind and heart of the man conscious of sin is God's knowledge of it all already and yet His undiminished love, God's welcome of him back, God's ready pardon. All this is true for the world in Christ, and is true for every individual soul.

The answer and the invitation here are immediate.

There is often a long period of painful struggle. It

looks as if the answer were not immediate. But that is because we do not listen to it.

III. The happy response of the returning soul.

That too is immediate. The soul believes God's promises. It recognises God's claim. It returns to Him. We are attracted by His grace. The sunflower turns to the sun. The penitent is not driven only, but drawn—God's own loving self-revelation in Christ is His true power. 'I, if I am lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.'

The consciousness of sin remains and is even deepened (subsequent verses), and yet is different. A light of hope is in it. The very sense of sin brings us to Him, to hide our faces on His heart like a child in its mother's lap.

This response of the soul may be instantaneous. If it is not immediate, it too probably will never be at all.

A QUESTION FOR THE BEGINNING

'What will ye do in the end?'—Jer. v. 31.

I find that I preached to the young from this text just thirty years since—nearly a generation ago. How few of my then congregation are here to-night! how changed they and I are! and how much nearer the close we have drifted! How many of the young men and women of that evening have gone to meet the end, and how many of them have wrecked their lives because they would not face and answer this question!

Ah, dear young friends, if I could bring some of the living and some of the dead, and set them to witness here instead of me, they would burn in on you, as my poor words never can do, the insanity of living without

a satisfactory and sufficient reply to the question of my text, 'What will ye do in the end?'

In its original application these words referred to a condition of religious and moral corruption in which a whole nation was involved. The men that should have spoken for God were 'prophesying lies.' The priests connived at profitable falsehoods because by these their rule was confirmed. And the deluded populace, as is always the case, preferred smooth falsehoods to stern truths. So the prophet turns round indignantly, and asks what can be the end of such a welter and carnival of vice and immorality, and beseeches his contemporaries to mend their ways by bethinking themselves of what their course led to.

But we may dismiss the immediate application of the words for the sake of looking at the general principle which underlies them. It is a very familiar and well-worn one. It is simply this, that a large part of the wise conduct of life depends on grave consideration of consequences. It is a sharp-pointed question, that pricks many a bubble, and brings much wisdom down into the category of folly. There would be less misery in the world, and fewer fair young lives cast away upon grim rocks, if the question of my text were oftener asked and answered.

I. I note, first, that here is a question which every wise man will ask himself.

I do not mean to say that the consideration of consequences is the highest guide, nor that it is always a sufficient one; nor that it is, by any means, in every case, an easily applied one. For we can all conceive of circumstances in which it is the plainest duty to take a certain course of action, knowing that, as far as this life is

concerned, it will bring down disaster and ruin. Do right! and face *any* results therefrom. He who is always forecasting possible issues has a very leaden rule of conduct, and will be so afraid of results that he will not dare to move; and his creeping prudence will often turn out to be the truest imprudence.

But whilst all that is true, and many deductions must be made from the principle which I have laid down, that the consideration of circumstances is a good guide in life, yet there are regions in which the question comes home with direct and illuminating force. Let me just illustrate one or two of these.

Take the lower application of the question to nearer ends in life. Now this awful life that we live is so strangely concatenated of causes and effects, and each little deed drags after it such a train of eternal and ever-widening consequences, that a man must be an idiot if he never looks an inch beyond his nose to see the bearing of his actions. I believe that, in the long-run, and in the general, condition is the result of character and of conduct; and that, whatsoever deductions may be necessary, yet, speaking generally, and for the most part, men are the architects of their own condition, and that they make the houses that they dwell in to fit the convolutions of the body that dwells within them. And, that being so, it being certain that 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,' and that no deed, be it ever so small, be it ever so evanescent, be it ever so entirely confined within our own inward nature, and never travelling out into visibility in what men call actions—that every one of such produces an eternal, though it may be an all but imperceptible effect, upon ourselves; oh, surely there can be nothing more ridiculous than that

a man should refrain from forecasting the issue of his conduct, and saying to himself, 'What am I to do in the end?'

If you would only do that in regard to hosts of things in your daily life you *could* not be the men and women that you are. If the lazy student would only bring clearly before his mind the examination-room, and the unanswerable paper, and the bitter mortification when the pass-list comes out and his name is not there, he would not trifle and dawdle and seek all manner of diversions as he does, but he would bind himself to his desk and his task. If the young man who begins to tamper with purity, and in the midst of the temptations of a great city to gratify the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh, because he is away from the shelter of his father's house, and the rebuke of his mother's purity, could see, as the older of us have seen, men with their bones full of the iniquity of their youth, or drifted away from the city to die, down in the country like a rat in a hole, do you think the temptations of the streets and low places of amusement would not be stripped of their fascination? If the man beginning to drink were to say to himself, 'What am I to do in the end?' when the craving becomes physical, and volition is suspended, and anything is sacrificed in order to still the domineering devil within, do you think he would begin? I do not believe that all sin comes from ignorance, but sure I am that if the sinful man saw what the end is he would, in nine cases out of ten, be held back. 'What will ye do in the end?' Use that question, dear friends, as the Ithuriel spear which will touch the squatting tempter at your ear, and there will start up, in its own shape, the fiend.

But the main application that I would ask you to make

of the words of my text is in reference to the final end, the passing from life. Death, the end, is likewise Death, the beginning. If it were an absolute end, as coarse infidelity pretends to believe it is, then, of course, such a question as my text would have no kind of relevance. 'What will ye do in the end?' 'Nothing! for I shall be nothing. I shall just go back to the nonentity that I was. I do not need to trouble myself.' Ah, but Janus has two faces, one turned to the present and one to the future. His temple has two gates, one which admits from this lower level, and one, at the back, which launches us out on to the higher level. The end is a beginning, and the beginning is retribution. The end of sowing is the beginning of harvest. The man finishes his work and commences to live on his wages. The brewing is over, and the drinking of the brewst commences.

And so, brother, 'What will ye do in the end—which is not an end, but which is a beginning?' Surely every wise man will take that question into consideration. Surely, if it be true that we all of us are silently drifting to that one little gateway through which we have to pass one by one, and then find ourselves in a region all full of consequences of the present, he has a good claim to be counted a prince of fools who 'jumps the life to come,' and, in all his calculations of consequences, which he applies wisely and prudently to the trifles of the present, forgets to ask himself, 'And, after all that is done, what shall I do then?' You remember the question in the old ballad:

> "'What good came of it at last?'
> 'Nay, that I cannot tell,' quoth he;
> But 'twas a famous victory.'"

Ay, but what came of it at the last? Oh brother, that one question, pushed to its issues, condemns the wisdom of this world as folly, and pulverises into nothingness millions of active lives and successful schemes. What then? What then? 'I have much goods laid up for many years.' Well and good, what then? 'I will say to my soul, Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' Yes, what then? 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee.' He never thought of that! And so his epitaph was 'Thou fool!'

II. So, secondly, mark, here is a question which a great many of us never think about.

I do not mean, now, so much in reference to the nearer ends compassed in this life, though even in regard to them it is only too true; I mean rather in regard to that great and solemn issue to which we are all tending. But in regard of both, it seems to me one of the strangest things in all the world that men should be content so commonly to be ignorant of what they perfectly well know, and never to give attention to that of which, should they bethink themselves, they are absolutely certain.

'What will ye do in the end?' Why! half of us put away that question with the thought in our minds, if not expressed, at least most operative, 'There is not going to be any end; and it is always going to be just like what it is to-day.' Did you ever think that there is no good ground for being sure that the sun will rise to-morrow; that it rose for the first time once; that there will come a day when it will rise for the last time? The uniformity of Nature may be a postulate, but you cannot find any logical basis for it. Or, to come down from heights of that sort, have you ever laid to heart,

brother, that the only unchangeable thing in this world is change, and the only thing certain, that there is no continuance of anything; and that, therefore, you and I are bound, if we are wise, to look that fact in the face, and not to allow ourselves to be befooled by the difficulty of imagining that things will ever be different from what they are? Oh! many of us—I was going to say most of men, I do not know that it would be an exaggeration—are like the careless inhabitants of some of those sunny, volcanic isles in the Eastern Ocean, where Nature is prodigally luxuriant and all things are fair, but every fifty years or so there comes a roar and the island shakes, and half of it, perhaps, is overwhelmed, and the lava flows down and destroys gleaming houses and smiling fields, and heaven is darkened with ashes, and then everything goes on as before, and people live as if it was never going to happen again, though every morning, when they go out, they see the cone towering above their houses, and the thin column of smoke, pale against the blue sky.

It is not altogether sinful or bad that we should live, to some extent, under the illusion of a fixity and a perpetuity which has no real existence, for it helps to concentrate effort and to consolidate habit, and to make life possible. But for men to live, as so many of us do, never thinking of what is more certain than anything else about us, that we shall slide out of this world, and find ourselves in another, is surely not the part of wisdom.

Another reason why so many of us shirk this question is the lamentable want of the habit of living by principle and reflection. Most men never see their life steadily, and see it whole. They live from hand to mouth, they are driven this way and that way; they adapt means to

ends in regard to business or the like, but in the formation of their character, and in the moulding of their whole being, crowds of them live a purely mechanical, instinctive, unreflective life. There is nothing more deplorable than the small extent to which reflection and volition really shape the lives of the bulk of mankind. Most of us take our cue from our circumstances, letting them dominate us. They tell us that in Nature there is such a thing as protective mimicry, as it is called—animals having the power—some of them to a much larger extent than others—of changing their hues in order to match the gravel of the stream in which they swim or the leaves of the trees on which they feed. That is like what a great many of us do. Put us into a place where certain forms of frivolity or vice are common, and we go in for them. Take us away from these and we change our hue to something a little whiter. But all through we never know what it is to put forth a good solid force of resistance and to say, 'No! I will not!' or, what is sometimes quite as hard to say, 'Yes! though,' as Luther said in his strong way, 'there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, I will!' If people would live more by reflection and by the power of a resisting will, this question of my text would come oftener to them.

And there is another cause that I must touch on for one moment, why so many people neglect this question, and that is because they are uneasily conscious that they durst not face it. I know of no stranger power than that by which men can ignore unwelcome questions; and I know of nothing more tragical than the fact that they choose to exercise the power. What would you think of a man who never took stock because he knew that he

was insolvent, and yet did not want to know it? And what do you think of yourselves if, knowing that the thought of passing into that solemn eternity is anything but a cheering one, and that you have to pass thither, you never turn your head to look at it? Ah, brother, if it be true that this question of my text is unpleasant to you to hear put, be sure that that is the strongest reason why you should put it.

III. Thirdly, here is a question especially directed to you young folk.

It is so because you are specially tempted to forget it. It may seem as if there were no people in the world that had less need to be appealed to, as I have been appealing to you, by motives drawn from the end of life, than you who are only standing at its beginning. But it is not so. An old rabbi was once asked by his pupil when he should fulfil a certain precept of the law, and the answer was, 'The day before you die.' 'But,' said the disciple, 'I may die to-morrow.' 'Then,' said the master, 'do it to-day.' And so I say to you, do not make sure that the beginning at which you stand is separated by a long tract of years from the end to which you go. It may be, but it may not be. I know that arguments pleading with men to be Christians, and drawn from the consideration of a future life, are not fashionable nowadays, but I am persuaded that that preaching of the Gospel is seriously defective, and will be lamentably ineffective, which ignores this altogether. And, therefore, dear friends, I say to you that, although in all human probability a stretch of years may lie between you and the end of life, the question of my text is one specially adapted to you.

And it is so because, with your buoyancy, with your

necessarily limited experience, with the small accumulation of results that you have already in your possession, and with the tendencies of your age to live rather by impulse than by reflection, you are specially tempted to forget the solemn significance of this interrogation. And it is a question especially for you, because you have special advantages in the matter of putting it. We older people are all fixed and fossils, as you are very fond of telling us. The iron has cooled and gone into rigid shapes with us. It is all fluent with you. You may become pretty nearly what you like. I do not mean in regard to circumstances: other considerations come in to determine these; but circumstances are second, character is first; and I do say, in regard to character, you young folk have all but infinite possibilities before you; and, I repeat, may become almost anything that you set yourselves to be. You have no long, weary trail of failures behind you, depressing and seeming to bring an entail of like failure with them for the future. You have not yet acquired habits—those awful things that may be our worst foes or our best friends—you have not yet acquired habits that almost smother the power of reform and change. You have, perhaps, years before you in which you may practise the lessons of wisdom and self-restraint which this question fairly fronted would bring. And so I lay it on your hearts, dear young friends. I have little hope of the old people. I do not despair of any, God forbid! but the fact remains that the most of the men who have done anything for God and the world worth doing have been under the influence of Christian principle in their early days. And from fifteen to one or two and twenty is the period in which you get the set which, in all likelihood, you will retain through eternity. So,

'What will ye do in the end?' Answer the question whilst yet it is possible to answer it, with a stretch of years before you in which you may work out the conclusions to which the answer brings.

IV. And that leads me to say, last of all, and but a word, that here is a question which Jesus Christ alone enables a man to answer with calm confidence.

As I have said, the end is a beginning; the passage from life is the entrance on a progressive and eternal state of retribution. And Jesus Christ tells us two other things. He tells us that that state has two parts; that in one there is union with Him, life, blessedness for ever; and that in the other there is darkness, separation from Him, death, and misery. These are the facts, as revealed by the incarnate Word of God, on which answers to this question must be shaped.

'What will ye do in the end?' If I am trusting to Him; if I have brought my poor, weak nature and sinful soul to Him, and cast them upon His merciful sacrifice and mighty intercession and life-giving Spirit, then I can say: 'As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.' Ay, and what about those who do not take Him for their Prince and their Saviour? 'What will *ye* do in the end?' When life's illusions are over, when all its bubbles are burst, when conscience awakes, and when you stand to give an account of yourself to God, 'What will ye do in the end' which is a beginning? 'Can thy heart endure and thy hand be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee?' Oh brother, do not turn away from that Christ who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending! If you will cleave to Him, then you may let the years and weeks slip away without

regret; and whether the close be far off or near, death will be robbed of all its terrors, and the future so filled with blessedness, that of you the wise man's paradox will be true: 'Better is the end of a thing than the beginning, and the day of death than the day of birth.'

POSSESSING AND POSSESSED

'The portion of Jacob is not like them: for He is the former of all things: and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance. The Lord of Hosts is His name.' —JER. x. 16, R.V.

HERE we have set forth a reciprocal possession. We possess God, He possesses us. We are His inheritance, He is our portion. I am His; He is mine.

This mutual ownership is the very living centre of all religion. Without it there is no relation of any depth between God and us. How much profounder such a conception is than the shallow notions about religion which so many men have! It is not a round of observance; not a painful effort at obedience, not a dim reverence for some vague supernatural, not a far-off bowing before Omnipotence, not the mere acceptance of a creed, but a life in which God and the soul blend in the intimacies of mutual possession.

I. The mutual possession.

God is our portion.

That thought presupposes the possibility of our possessing God. It presupposes the fact that He has given Himself to us, and the answering fact that we have taken Him for ours.

We are God's inheritance.

We give ourselves to Him—we do so where we apprehend that He has given Himself to us; it is His giving love that moves men to yield themselves to God. He

takes us for His. What a wonderful thought that He delights in possessing us! The all-sufficiency of our portion is guaranteed because He is 'the former of all things.' The safety of His inheritance is secured because 'the Lord of Hosts is His name.' And that name accentuates the wonder that He to whom all the ordered armies of the universe submit and belong should still take us for His inheritance.

Mark the contrast of this true possession with the false and merely external possessions of the world. Those outward things which a man has stand in no real relation with him. They fade and fleet away, or have to be left, and, even while they last, are not his in any real sense. Only what has indissolubly entered into, and become one with, our very selves is truly ours.

Our possession of God suggests a view of our blessedness and our obligation. It secures blessedness—for we have in Him an all-sufficient object and a treasure for all our nature. It imposes the obligation to let our whole nature feed upon, and be filled by, Him, to see that the temple where He dwells is clean, and not to fling away our treasure.

His possession of us suggests a corresponding view of our blessedness and our obligation.

We are His—as slaves are their owners' property. So we are bound to submission of will. To be owned by God is an honour. The slave's goods and chattels belong to the master.

His possession of us binds us to consecrate ourselves, and so to glorify Him in 'body and spirit which are His.'

It ensures our safety. How constantly this calming thought is dwelt on in Scripture—that they who belong to Him need fear nothing. 'Fear not, I have called

thee by thy name, thou art Mine.' God does not hold His possessions with so slack a grasp as to lose them or to suffer them to be wrenched away. A psalmist rose to the hope of immortality by meditating on what was involved in his being God's possession here and now. He was sure that even Death's bony fingers could not keep their hold on him, and so he sang, 'Thou wilt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.' The seal on the foundation of God which guarantees its standing sure is, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.' 'They shall be Mine in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure,' is His own assurance, on which resting, a trembling soul may 'have boldness in the day of judgment.'

II. The human response by which God becomes ours and we His.

That response is first the act of faith, which is an act of both reason and will, and then the act of love and self-surrender which follows faith, and then the continuous acts of communion and consecration.

All must commence with recognition of His free gift of Himself to us in Christ. We come empty-handed. That gift recognised and accepted moves us to give ourselves to Him. When we give ourselves to Him we find that we possess Him.

Further, there must be continuous communion. This mutual possession depends on our occupation of mind and heart with Him. We possess Him and are possessed by Him, when our wills are kept in harmony with, and submission to, Him, when our thoughts are occupied with Him and His truth, when our affections rest in Him, when our desires go out to Him, when our hopes are centred in Him, when our practical life is devoted to Him.

III. The blessedness of this mutual possession.

To possess God is to have an all-sufficient object for all our nature. He who has God for his very own has the fountain of life in himself, has the spring of living water, as it were, in his own courtyard, and needs not to go elsewhere to draw. He need fear no loss, for his wealth is so engrained in the very substance of his being that nothing can rob him of it but himself, and that whilst he lasts it will last with, because in, him.

How marvellous that into the narrow room of one poor soul He should come whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain! Solomon said, 'How much less this house which I have built,'—well may we say the same of our little hearts. But He can compress Himself into that small compass and expand His abode by dwelling in it.

Nor is the blessedness of being possessed by Him less than the blessedness of possessing Him. For so long as we own ourselves we are burdens to ourselves, and we only own ourselves truly when we give ourselves away utterly. Earthly love, with its blessed mysteries of mutual possession, teaches us that. But all its depth and joy are as nothing when set beside the liberty, the glad peace, the assured possession of our enriched selves, which are ours when we give oursleves wholly to God, and so for the first time are truly lords of ourselves, and find ourselves by losing ourselves in Him.

Nor need we fear to say that God, too, delights in that mutual possession, for the very essence of love is the desire to impart itself, and He is love supreme and perfect. Therefore is He glad when we let Him give Himself to us, and moved by 'the mercies of God, yield ourselves to Him a sacrifice of a sweet smell, acceptable to God.'

CALMS AND CRISES

'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?'—JER. xii. 5, R.V.

THE prophet has been complaining of his persecutors. The divine answer is here, reproving his impatience, and giving him to understand that harder trials are in store for him.

Both clauses mean substantially the same thing, and are of a parabolic nature. The one adduces the metaphor of a race: 'Footmen have beaten you, have they? Then how will you run with cavalry?' The other is more clear in the Revised Version rendering: 'Though in a land of peace you are secure, what will you do in Jordan when it swells?' The 'swelling of Jordan' is a figure for extreme danger.

The questions may be taken as referring to our own lives Note how the one refers more to strength for duties, the other to peace and safety in dangers. They both recognise that life has great alternations as to the magnitude of its tasks and trials, and they call on experience to answer the question whether we are ready for times of stress and peril.

I. Think of what may come to us.

We all have had the experience of how in our lives there are long stretches of uneventful days, and then, generally without warning, some crisis is sprung on us, which demands quite a different order of qualities to cope with it. Our typhoons generally come without any warning from a falling barometer.

We may at any moment be confronted with some hard duty which will task our utmost energy.

We may at any moment be plunged in some great ca-

lamity to which the quiet course of our lives for years will be as the still flow of the river between smiling lawns is to the dash and fierce currents of the rapids in a grim cañon.

The tasks that may come on us and the tasks that must come, the dangers that may beset us and the dangers that must envelop us, the possibilities that lie hidden in the future, and the certainties that we know to be shrouded there, should surely sometimes occupy a wise man's thoughts. It is but living in a fool's paradise to soothe ourselves with the assurance which a moment's thought will shatter: 'To-morrow shall be as this day.' We shall not always have the easy competition with footmen; there will some time come a call to strain our muscles to keep up with the gallop of cavalry. We shall have to struggle to keep our feet in the swelling of Jordan, and must not expect to have a continual leisurely life in 'a land of peace.'

II. Think of what experience tells us as to our power to meet these crises.

The footmen have wearied you. The small tasks have been more than your patience and strength could manage. No doubt great exigencies often call forth great powers that were dormant in the humdrum of ordinary life. But the man who knows himself best will be the most ready to shrink with distrust from the dread possibilities of duty.

If we think of the 'footmen' with whom we have contended as representing the smaller faults that we have tried to overcome, does our success in conquering some small bad habit, some 'little sin,' encourage the hope that we could keep our footing when some great temptation of a lifetime came down on us with a rush like

the charge of a battalion of horsemen? Or, if we cast our eyes forward to the calamities that lie still 'on the knees of the gods' for us, do we feel ready to meet the hours of desolating disaster, the 'hour of death and the day of judgment'? Even in a land of peace we have all had alarms, perturbations, and defeats enough, and our security has been at the mercy of marauders so often that if we are wise, and take due heed of what experience has to say to us of our reserve of force, we shall not be hopeful of keeping our footing in the whirling currents of a river in full flood.

III. Think of the power that will fit us for all crises.

With the power of Jesus in our spirits we shall never have to attempt a duty for which we are not strengthened, nor to front a danger from and in which He will not defend us. With His life in us we shall be ready for the long hours of uneventful, unexciting duties, and for the short spurts that make exacting calls on us. We 'shall run and not be weary; we shall walk and not faint.' If we live in Jesus we shall always be in 'a land of peace,' and no 'plague shall come nigh our dwelling.' Even when the soles of our feet rest in the waters of Jordan, the waters of Jordan shall be cut off, and we shall pass over on dry ground into the land of peace, where they that would swallow us up shall be far away for ever.

AN IMPOSSIBILITY MADE POSSIBLE

'Can the Ethiopian change his skin?'—JER. xiii. 23.
'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.'—2 COR. v. 17.
'Behold, I make all things new.'—REV. xxi. 5.

PUT these three texts together. The first is a despairing question to which experience gives only too sad and de-

cisive a negative answer. It is the answer of many people who tell us that character must be eternal, and of many a baffled man who says, 'It is of no use—I have tried and can do nothing.' The second text is the grand Christian answer, full of confidence. It was spoken by one who had no superficial estimate of the evil, but who had known in himself the power of Christ to revolutionise a life, and make a man love all he had hated, and hate all he had loved, and fling away all he had treasured. The last text predicts the completion of the renovating process lying far ahead, but as certain as sunrise.

I. The unchangeableness of character, especially of faults.

We note the picturesque rhetorical question here. They were occasionally accustomed to see the dark-skinned Ethiopian, whether we suppose that these were true negroes from Southern Egypt or dark Arabs, and now and then leopards came up from the thickets on the Jordan, or from the hills of the southern wilderness about the Dead Sea. The black hue of the man, the dark spots that starred the skin of the fierce beast, are fitting emblems of the evil that dyes and speckles the soul. Whether it wraps the whole character in black, or whether it only spots it here and there with tawny yellow, it is ineradicable; and a man can no more change his character once formed than a negro can cast his skin, or a leopard whiten out the spots on his hide.

Now we do not need to assert that a man has no power of self-improvement or reformation. The exhortations of the prophet to repentance and to cleansing imply that he has. If he has not, then it is no blame to him that he does not mend. Experience shows that we have a very considerable power of such a kind. It is a pity that

some Christian teachers speak in exaggerated terms about the impossibility of such self-improvement.

But it is very difficult.

Note the great antagonist as set forth here—Habit, that solemn and mystical power. We do not know all the ways in which it operates, but one chief way is through physical cravings set up. It is strange how much easier a second time is than a first, especially in regard to evil acts. The hedge once broken down, it is very easy to get through it again. If one drop of water has percolated through the dyke, there will be a roaring torrent soon. There is all the difference between once and never; there is small difference between once and twice. By habit we come to do things mechanically and without effort, and we all like that. One solitary footfall across the snow soon becomes a beaten way. As in the banyan-tree, each branch becomes a root. All life is held together by cords of custom which enable us to reserve conscious effort and intelligence for greater moments. Habit tends to weigh upon us with a pressure 'heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.' But also it is the ally of good.

The change to good is further made difficult because liking too often goes with evil, and good is only won by effort. It is a proof of man's corruption that if left alone, evil in some form or other springs spontaneously, and that the opposite good is hard to win. Uncultivated soil bears thistles and weeds. Anything can roll downhill. It is always the least trouble to go on as we have been going.

Further, the change is made difficult because custom blinds judgment and conscience. People accustomed to a vitiated atmosphere are not aware of its foulness.

How long it takes a nation, for instance, to awake to consciousness of some national crime, even when the nation is 'Christian'! And how men get perfectly sophisticated as to their own sins, and have all manner of euphemisms for them!

Further, how hard it is to put energy into a will that has been enfeebled by long compliance. Like prisoners brought out of the Bastille.

So if we put all these reasons together, no wonder that such reformation is rare.

I do not dwell on the point that it must necessarily be confined within very narrow limits. I appeal to experience. You have tried to cure some trivial habit. You know what a task that has been—how often you thought that you had conquered, and then found that all had to be done over again. How much more is this the case in this greater work! Often the efforts to break off evil habits have the same effect as the struggles of cattle mired in a bog, who sink the deeper for plunging. The sad cry of many a foiled wrestler with his own evil is, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' We do not wish to exaggerate, but simply to put it that experience shows that for men in general, custom and inclination and indolence and the lack of adequate motive weigh so heavily that a thorough abandonment of evil, much more a hearty practice of good, are not to be looked for when once a character has been formed. So you young people, take care. And all of us listen to—

II. The great hope for individual renewal.

The second text sets forth a possibility of entire individual renewal, and does so by a strong metaphor.

'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature,' or as

the words might be rendered, 'there is a new creation,' and not only is he renewed, but all things are become new. He is a new Adam in a new world.

Now (*a*) let us beware of exaggeration about this matter. There are often things said about the effects of conversion which are very far in advance of reality, and give a handle to caricature. The great law of continuity runs on through the change of conversion. Take a man who has been the slave of some sin. The evil will not cease to tempt, nor will the effects of the past on character be annihilated. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,' remains true. In many ways there will be permanent consequences. There will remain the scars of old wounds; old sores will be ready to burst forth afresh. The great outlines of character do remain.

(*b*) What is the condition of renewal?

'If any man be in Christ'—how distinctly that implies something more than human in Paul's conception of Christ. It implies personal union with Him, so that He is the very element or atmosphere in which we live. And that union is brought about by faith in Him.

(*c*) How does such a state of union with Christ make a man over again?

It gives a new aim and centre for our lives. Then we live not unto ourselves; then everything is different and looks so, for the centre is shifted. That union introduces a constant reference to Him and contemplation of His death for us, it leads to self-abnegation.

It puts all life under the influence of a new love. 'The love of Christ constraineth.' As is a man's love, so is his life. The mightiest revolution is to excite a new love, by which old loves and tastes are expelled. 'A new affection' has 'expulsive power,' as the new sap ris-

ing in the springtime pushes off the lingering withered leaves. So union with Him meets the difficulty arising from inclination still hankering after evil. It lifts life into a higher level where the noxious creatures that were proper to the swamps cannot live. The new love gives a new and mighty motive for obedience.

That union breaks the terrible chain that binds us to the past. 'All died.' The past is broken as much as if we were dead. It is broken by the great act of forgiveness. Sin holds men by making them feel as if what has been must be—an awful entail of evil. In Christ we die to former self.

That union brings a new divine power to work in us. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

It sets us in a new world which yet is the old. All things are changed if we are changed. They are the same old things, but seen in a new light, used for new purposes, disclosing new relations and powers. Earth becomes a school and discipline for heaven. The world is different to a blind man when cured, or to a deaf one,—there are new sights for the one, new sounds for the other.

All this is true in the measure in which we live in union with Christ.

So no man need despair, nor think, 'I cannot mend now.' You may have tried and been defeated a thousand times. But still victory is possible, not without effort and sore conflict, but still possible. There is hope for all, and hope for ME.

III. The completion in a perfectly renewed creation.

The renovation here is only partial. Its very incompleteness is prophetic. If there be this new life in us, it obviously has not reached its fulness here, and it is obviously not manifested here for all that even here it is.

It is like some exotic that does not show its true beauty in our greenhouses. The life of a Christian on earth is a prophecy by both its greatness and its smallness, by both its glory and its shame, by both its brightness and its spots. It cannot be that there is always to be this disproportion between aspiration and performance, between willing and doing. Here the most perfect career is like a half-lighted street, with long gaps between the lamps.

The surroundings here are uncongenial to the new creatures. 'Foxes have holes'—all creatures are fitted for their environment; only man, and eminently renewed man, wanders as a pilgrim, not in his home. The present frame of things is for discipline. The schooling over, we burn the rod. So we look for an external order in full correspondence with the new nature.

And Christ throned 'makes all things new.' How far the old is renewed we cannot tell, and we need not ask. Enough that there shall be a universe in perfect harmony with the completely renewed nature, that we shall find a home where all things will serve and help and gladden and further us, where the outward will no more distract and clog the spirit.

Brethren, let that mighty love constrain you; and look to Christ to renew you. Whatever your old self may have been, you may bury it deep in His grave, and rise with Him to newness of life. Then you may walk in this old world, new creatures in Christ Jesus, looking for the blessed hope of entire renewal into the perfect likeness of Him, the perfect man, in a perfect world, where all old sorrows and sins have passed away and He has made all things new. Through eternity, new joys, new knowledge, new progress, new likeness, new service will

be ours—and not one leaf shall ever wither in the amaranthine crown, nor 'the cup of blessing' ever become empty or flat and stale. Eternity will be but a continual renewal and a progressive increase of ever fresh and ever familiar treasures. The new and the old will be one.

Begin with trusting to Him to help you to change a deeper blackness than that of the Ethiopian's skin, and to erase firier spots than stain the tawny leopard's hide, and He will make you a new man, and set you in His own time in a 'new heaven and earth, where dwelleth righteousness.'

TRIUMPHANT PRAYER

'O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against Thee. 8. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? 9. Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy name; leave us not.'—JER. xiv. 7–9.

MY purpose now carries me very far away from the immediate occasion of these words; yet I cannot refrain from a passing reference to the wonderful pathos and picturesque power with which the long-forgotten calamity that evoked them is portrayed in the context. A terrible drought has fallen upon the land, and the prophet's picture of it is, if one might say so, like some of Dante's in its realism, in its tenderness, and in its terror. In the presence of a common calamity all distinctions of class have vanished, and the nobles send their little ones to the well, and they come back with empty vessels and drooping heads instead of with the gladness that used to be heard in the place of drawing of water. The ploughmen are standing among the cracked furrows, gazing

with despair on the brown chapped earth, and in the field the very dumb creatures are sharing in the common sorrow, and the imperious law of self-preservation overpowers and crushes the maternal instincts. 'Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass.' And on every little hilltop where cooler air might be found, the once untamable wild asses are standing with open nostrils panting for the breeze, their filmy eyes failing them, gazing for the rain that will not come. And then, from contemplating all that sorrow, the prophet turns to God with a wondrous burst of strangely blended confidence and abasement, penitence and trust, and fuses together the acknowledgment of sin and reliance upon the established and perpetual relation between Israel and God, pleading with Him about His judgments, presenting before Him the mysterious contradiction that such a calamity should fall on those with whom God dwelt, and casting himself lowly before the throne, and pleading the ancient name: 'Do Thou it! Leave us not.'

It is to the wonderful fulness and richness of this prayer that I ask your attention in these few remarks. Expositors have differed as to whether the drought that forms its basis was a literal one, or is the prophet's way of putting the sore calamities that had fallen on Israel. Be that as it may, I need not remind you how often in Scripture that metaphor of the 'rain that cometh down from heaven and watereth the earth' is the symbol for God's divine gift of His Spirit, and how, on the other hand, the picture of the 'dry and thirsty land where no water is' is the appropriate figure for the condition of the soul or of the Church void of the divine presence. And I think I shall not mistake if I say that though we

have much to make us thankful, yet you and I, dear brethren, and all our Churches and congregations, are suffering under this drought, and the merciful 'rain wherewith Thou dost confirm Thine inheritance when it is weary' has not yet come as we would have it. May we find in these words some gospel for the day that may help us to come to the temper of mind into which there shall descend the showers to 'make soft the earth and bless the springing thereof!'

Glancing over these clauses, then, and trying to put them into something like order for our purpose, there are four things that I would have you note. The first is the mysterious contradiction between the ideal Israel and the actual state of things; the second is the earnest inquiry as to the cause; the third the penitent confession of our sinfulness; and the last, the triumphant confidence of believing prayer.

I. First of all, then, look at the illustration given to us by these words of the mysterious contradiction between the ideal of Israel and the actual condition of things.

Recur, for the sake of illustration, to the historical event upon which our text is based. The old prophet had said, 'The Lord thy God giveth thee a good land, a land full of brooks and water, rivers and depths, a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it'; and the startling fact is, that these men saw around them a land full of misery for want of that very gift which had been promised. The ancient charter of Israel's existence was that God should dwell in the midst of them, and what was it that they beheld? 'As things are,' says the prophet, 'it looks as if that perennial presence which Thou hast

promised had been changed into visits, short and far between. Why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man, that turneth aside to tarry for a night?'

Now, I suppose there are two ideas intended to be conveyed—the brief, transitory, interrupted visits, with long, dreary stretches of absence between them; and the indifference of the visitant, as a man who pitches his tent in some little village to-night cares very little about the people that he never saw before this afternoon's march, and will never see after to-morrow morning. And not only is it so, but, instead of the perpetual energy of this divine aid that had been promised to Israel, as things are now, it looks as if He was a mighty man astonied, a hero that cannot save—some warrior stricken by panic fear into a paralysis of all his strength—a Samson with his locks shorn. The ideal had been so great—perpetual gifts, perpetual presence, perpetual energy; the reality is chapped ground and parched places, occasional visitations, like vanishing gleams of sunshine in a winter's day, and a paralysis, as it would appear, of all the ancient might.

Dear Christian friends, am I exaggerating, or dealing only with one set of phenomena, and forgetting the counterpoising ones on the other side, when I say, Change the name, and the story is told about us? God be thanked we have much that shows us that He has not left us, but yet, when we think of what we are, and of what God has promised that we should be, surely we must confess that there is the most sad, and, but for one reason, the most mysterious contradiction between the divine ideal and the actual facts of the case. Need we go further to learn what God meant His Church to be,

than the last words that Jesus Christ said to us—'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world'? Need we go further than those metaphors which come from His lips as precepts, and, like all His precepts, are a commandment upon the surface, but a promise in the sweet kernel—'Ye are the salt of the earth,' 'ye are the light of the world'—or than the prophet's vision of an Israel which 'shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord'? Is that the description of what you and I are? Have not we to say, 'We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen'? 'Salt of the earth,' and we can hardly keep our own souls from going putrid with the corruption that is round about us. 'Light of the world,' and our poor candles burnt low down into the socket, and sending up rather stench and smoke than anything like a clear flame. The words sound like irony rather than promises, like the very opposite of what we are rather than the ideals towards which our lives strive. In our lips they are presumption, and in the lips of the world, as we only too well know, they are a not undeserved scoff, to be said with curved lip, 'The salt of the earth,' and 'the light of the world'!

And look at what we are doing: scarcely holding our own numerically. Here and there a man comes and declares what God has done for his soul. But what is the Church, what are the Christian men of England, with all their multifarious activities, performing? Are we leavening the national mind? Are we breathing a higher godliness into trade, a more wholesome, simple style of living into society? And as for expansion, why, the Church at home does not keep up with the actual increase of the population; and we are conquering hea-

thendom as we might hope to drain the ocean by taking out thimblefuls at a time. Is that what the Lord meant us to do? Our Father with us; yes, but oh! as a 'mighty man, astonied,' as He might well be, 'that cannot save' for the old, old reason, 'He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.' No wonder that on the other side men are saying—and it is not such a very presumptuous thing to say, if you have regard only to the facts that appear on the surface—men are saying, 'wait a little while, and all these organisations will come to nothing; these Christian churches, as they are called,' and everything that you and I regard as distinctive of Christianity, 'will be gone and be forgotten.' We believe ourselves to be in possession of an eternal light; the world looks at us and sees that it is like a flickering flame in a dying lamp. Dear brethren, if I think of the lowness of our own religious characters, the small extent to which we influence the society in which we live, of the slow rate at which the Gospel progresses in our land, I can only ask the question, and pray you to lay it to heart, which the old prophet asked long ago: 'O Thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings? Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly?' 'Why shouldest Thou be as a mighty man that cannot save?'

II. Let me ask you to look at the second thought that I think may fairly be gathered from these words, namely, that this consciousness of our low and evil condition ought to lead to very earnest and serious inquiry as to its cause.

The prophet having acknowledged transgression yet asks a question, 'Why shouldest Thou leave us? Why

have all these things come upon us?' And he asks it not as ignorant of the answer, but in order that the answer may be deepened in the consciences and perceptions of those that listen to him, and that they together may take the answer to the Throne of God. There can be no doubt in a Christian mind as to the reason, and yet there is an absolute necessity that the familiar truth as to the reason should be driven home to our own consciences, and made part of our own spiritual experience, by our own honest reiteration of it and reflection upon it.

'Why shouldest Thou leave us?' Now, I need not spend time by taking into consideration answers that other people might give. I suppose that none of us will say that the reason is in any variableness of that unalterable, uniform, ever present, ever full, divine gift of God's Spirit to His children. We do not believe in any arbitrary sovereignty that withdraws that gift; we do not believe that that gift rises and falls in its fulness and its abundance. We believe that the great reservoir is always full, and that, if ever our small tanks be empty, it is because there is something choking the pipe, not because there is anything less in the centre storehouse. We believe, if I may take another illustration, that it is with the seasons and the rotation of day and night in the religious experience as it is with them in the natural world. Summer and winter come and go, not because of any variableness in the centre orb, but because of the variation in the inclination of the circling satellite; day and night come not by reason of any 'shadow cast by turning' from the sun that revolves not at all—but by reason of the side that is turned to his life-giving and quickening beams. We believe that all the clouds and mist that come between us and God are like the clouds

and mist of the sky, not dropped upon us from the blue empyrean above, but sucked up from the undrained swamps and poisonous fens of the lower earth. That is to say, if there be any change in the fulness of our possession of the divine Spirit, the fault lies wholly within the region of the mutable and of the human, and not at all in the region of the perennial and divine.

Nor do we believe, I suppose, any of us, that we are to look for any part of the reason in failure of the adaptation of God's work and God's ordinances to the great work which they have to do. Other people may tell us, if they like—it will not shake our confidence—that the fire that was kindled at Pentecost has all died down to grey ashes, and that it is of no use trying to cower over the burnt-out embers any more in order to get heat out of them. They may, and do, tell us that the 'rushing, mighty wind that filled the house' obeys the law of cycles as the wind of the natural universe, and will calm into stillness after a while, and then set in and blow from the opposite quarter. They may tell us, and they do tell us, that the 'river of the water of life that flows from the Throne of God and of the Lamb' is lost in the sands of time, like the streams in the great Mongolian plateau. We do not believe that. Everything stands exactly as it always has been in regard to the perennial possession of Christ's Spirit as the strength and resource of His Church; and the fault, dear friends, lies only here: 'O Lord, our iniquities testify against us; our backslidings are many; we have sinned against Thee.'

Oh, let me urge upon you, and upon myself, that the first thing which we have to do is prayerfully and patiently and honestly to search after this cause, and not look to superficial trifles such as possible variations and

improvements in order and machinery, and polity or creed, or anything else, as the means of changing and bettering the condition of things, but to recognise this as being the one sole cause that hinders—the slackness of our own hold on Christ's hand, and the feebleness and imperfection of our own spiritual life. Dear brethren, there is no worse sign of the condition of churches than the calm indifference and complacency in the present condition of things which visits very many of us; it is like a deadly malaria wherever it is to be found, and there is no more certain precursor of a blessed change than a widespread dissatisfaction with what we are, and an honest, earnest search after the cause. The sleeper that is restless, and tosses and turns, is near awakening; and the ice that cracks, and crumbles, and groans, and heaves, is on the point of breaking up. When Christian men and women are aroused to this, the startled recognition of how far beneath the ideal—no, I should not say how far beneath, but rather how absolutely opposed to, the ideal—so much of our Christian life and work is, and when further they push the inquiry for the cause, so as to find that it lies in their own sin, then we shall be near the time, yea, the 'set time, to favour Zion.'

III. And so let me point you, in the next place—and but a word or two on that matter—to the consideration that the consciousness of the evil condition and knowledge of its cause leads on to lowly penitence and confession.

I dwell upon that for a moment for one reason mainly. I suppose that it is a very familiar observation with us all that when, by God's mercy, any of us individually, or as communities, are awakened to a sense of our own departure from what He would have us be, and the fee-

bleness of all our Christian work, we are very apt to be led away upon the wrong scent altogether, and instead of seeking improvement and revivification in God's order, we set up an order of our own, which is a great deal more pleasing to our own natural inclinations. For instance, to bring the thing to a practical illustration, suppose I were, after these remarks of mine, as a kind of corollary from them, to ask for volunteers for some new form of Christian work, I believe I should get twenty for one that I should get if I simply said, 'Brethren, let us go together and confess our sins before God, and ask Him not to leave us.' We are always tempted to originate some new kind of work, to manufacture a revival, to begin by bringing together the outcasts into the fold, instead of to begin by trying to deepen our own Christian character, and purifying our own hearts, and getting more and more of the life of God into our own spirits, and then to let the increase from without come as it may. The true law for us to follow is to begin with lowly abasement at His footstool, and when we have purged ourselves from faults and sins in the very act of confessing them, and of shaking them from us, then when we are fit for growth, external growth, we shall get it. But the revival of the Church is not what people fancy it to be so often nowadays, the gathering in of the unconverted into its fold—that is the consequence of the revival. The revival comes by the path of recognition of sin, and confession of sin, and forsaking of sin, and waiting before Him for His blessing and His Spirit. Let me put all that I would say about this matter into the one remark, that the law of the whole process is the old one which was exemplified on the day of Pentecost. 'Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people,

assemble the elders; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet; let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar. Yea, the Lord will be zealous for His land, and will pity His people; and I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh.' Brethren, to our knees and to confessions! Let us see to it that we are right in our own inmost hearts.

IV. And so, finally, look at the wonderful way in which in this text of ours the prophet fuses together into one indistinguishable and yet not confused whole, confession, and pleading remonstrance and also the confidence of triumphant prayer.

I cannot touch upon the various points of that as I would gladly do; but I must suggest one or two of them for your consideration. Look at the substance of his petition: 'Do Thou it for Thy name's sake.' 'Leave us not.' That is all he asks. He does not prescribe what is to be done. He does not ask for the taking away of the calamity, he simply asks for the continual presence and the operation of the divine hand, sure that God is in the midst of them, and working all things right. Let us shape our expectations in like fashion, not being careful to discover paths for Him to run in; but contented if we can realise the sweetness and the strength of His calming and purging presence, and willing to leave the manner of His working in His own hand.

Then, look at what the text suggests as pleas with God, and grounds of confidence for ourselves. 'Do Thou it for Thy name's sake, the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble. Thou art in the midst of us, we are called by Thy name.' There are three grounds upon which we may base our firm confidence. The one

is the name—all the ancient manifestations of Thy character, which have been from of old, and remain for our perpetual strength. 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts.' 'That which is Thy memorial unto all generations pledges Thee to the constant reiteration and reproduction, hour by hour, according to our necessity, of all the might, and the miracles, and the mercies of the past. Do Thou it for Thy name's sake.'

And then Jeremiah turns to the throne of God with another plea—'the hope of Israel'—and thereby fills his mouth with the argument drawn from the fact that the confidence of the Church is fixed upon Him, and that it cannot be that He will disappoint it. 'Because Thou hast given us Thy name, and because Thy name, by Thy grace, has become, through our faith, our hope, Thou art doubly bound—bound by what Thou art, bound by what we expect—to be with us, our strength and our confidence.'

And the final plea is the appeal to the perennial and essential relationship of God to His Church. 'We are called by Thy name'—'we belong to Thee. It were Thy concern and ours that Thy Gospel should spread in the world, and the honour of our Lord should be advanced. Thou hast not surely lost Thy hold of Thine own, or Thy care for Thine own property.' The psalmist said, 'Thou wilt not suffer him that is devoted to Thee to see corruption.' And what his faith felt to be impossible in regard to the bodily life is still more unthinkable in regard to the spiritual. It cannot be that that which belongs to Him should pass and perish. 'We are called by Thy name, and Thou, Lord, art in the midst of us'—not a Samson shorn of his locks; not

a wayfaring man turning aside to delay for a night; but the abiding Presence which makes the Church glad.

Dear brethren, calm and confident expectation should be our attitude, and lowly repentance should rise to triumphant believing hope, because God is moving round about us in this day. Thanks be to His name, there is spread through us all an expectation of great things. That expectation brings its own fulfilment, and is always God's way of preparing the path for His own large gifts, like the strange, indefinable attitude of expectation which we know filled the civilised world before the birth of Jesus Christ—like the breath of the morning that springs up before the sun rises, and says, 'The dawn; the dawn,' and dies away. The expectation is the precursor of the gift, and the prayer is the guarantee of the acceptance. Take an illustration. Those great lakes in Central Africa that are said to feed the Nile are filled with melting snows weeks and weeks before the water rises away down in Egypt, and brings fertility across the desert that it makes to glisten with greenness, and to rejoice and blossom as the rose. And so in silence, high up upon the mountains of God, fed by communion with Himself, the expectation rises to a flood-tide ere it flows down through all the channels of Christian organisation and activity, and blesses the valleys below. It is not for us to hurry the work of God, nor spasmodically to manufacture revivals. It is not for us, under the pretence of waiting for Him, to be cold and callous; but it is for us to question ourselves wherefore these things have come upon us, with lowly, penitent confession to turn to God, and ask Him to bless us. Oh, if we were to do this, we should not ask in vain! Let us take the prayer of our context, and say, 'We acknowledge, O

Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against Thee. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not Thou He, O Lord, our God? Therefore we will wait upon Thee.' Be sure that the old merciful answer will come to us, 'I will pour rivers of water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; and I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring.'

SIN'S WRITING AND ITS ERASURE

'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars.'—JER. xvii. 1.

'Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.'—2 COR. iii. 3.

'Blotting out the handwriting that was against us.'—COL. ii. 14.

I HAVE put these verses together because they all deal with substantially the same metaphor. The first is part of a prophet's solemn appeal. It describes the sin of the nation as indelible. It is written in two places. First, on their hearts, which reminds us of the promise of the new covenant to be written on the heart. The 'red-leaved tablets of the heart' are like waxen tables on which an iron stylus makes a deep mark, an ineradicable scar. So Judah's sin is, as it were, eaten into their heart, or, if we might so say, tattooed on it. It is also written on the stone horns of the altar, with a diamond which can cut the rock (an illustration of ancient knowledge of the properties of the diamond). That sounds a strange place for the record of sin to appear, but the image has profound meaning, as we shall see presently.

Then the two New Testament passages deal with other applications of the same metaphor. Christ is, in the first, represented as writing on the hearts of the Corinthians, and in the second, as taking away 'the handwriting contrary to us.' The general thought drawn from all is that sin's writing on men's hearts is erased by Christ and a new inscription substituted.

I. The handwriting of sin.

Sin committed is indelibly written on the heart of the doer.

'The heart,' of course, in Hebrew means more than merely the supposed seat of the affections. It is figuratively the centre of the spiritual life, just as physically it is the centre of the natural. Thoughts and affections, purposes and desires are all included, and out of it are 'the issues of life,' the whole outgoings of the being. It is the fountain and source of all the activity of the man, the central unity from which all comes. Taken in this wide sense it is really the whole inner self that is meant, or, as is said in one place, 'the hidden man of the heart.' And so the thought in this vigorous metaphor may be otherwise put, that all sin makes indelible marks on the whole inward nature of the man who does it.

Now to begin with, think for a moment of that truth that everything which we do reacts on us the doers.

We seldom think of this. Deeds are done, and we fancy that when done, they are done *with*. They pass, as far as outward seeming goes, and their distinguishable consequences in the outward world, in the vast majority of cases, soon apparently pass. All seems evanescent and irrecoverable as last year's snows, or the water that flowed over the cataract a century ago. But there is nothing more certain than that all which we do

leaves indelible traces on ourselves. The mightiest effect of a man's actions is on his own inward life. The recoil of the gun is more powerful than the blow from its shot. Our actions strike inwards and there produce their most important effects. The river runs ceaselessly and its waters pass away, but they bring down soil, which is deposited and makes firm land, or perhaps they carry down grains of gold.

This is the true solemnity of life, that in all which we do we are carrying on a double process, influencing others indeed, but influencing ourselves far more.

Consider the illustrations of this law in regard to our sins.

Now the last thing people think of when they hear sermons about 'sin' is that what is meant is the things that they are doing every day. I can only ask you to try to remember, while I speak, that I mean those little acts of temper, or triflings with truth, or yieldings to passion or anger, or indulgence in sensuality, and above all, the living without God, to which we are all prone.

(*a*) All wrong-doing makes indelible marks on character. It makes its own repetition easier. Habit strengthens inclination. Peter found denying his Lord three times easier than doing it once. It weakens resistance. In going downhill the first step is the only one that needs an effort; gravity will do the rest.

It drags after it a tendency to other evil. All wrong things have so much in common that they lead on to one another. A man with only one vice is a rare phenomenon. Satan sends *his* apostles forth two by two. Sins hunt in couples, or more usually in packs, like wolves, only now and then do they prey alone like lions. Small thieves open windows for greater ones.

It requires continually increasing draughts, like indulgence in stimulants. The palate demands cayenne to-morrow, if it has had black pepper to-day.

So, whatever else we do by our acts, we are making our own characters, either steadily depraving or steadily improving them. There will come a slight slow change, almost unnoticed but most certain, as a dim film will creep over the peach, robbing it of all its bloom, or some microscopic growth will steal across a clearly cut inscription, or a breath of mist will dim a polished steel mirror.

(*b*) All wrong-doing writes indelible records on the memory, that awful and mysterious power of recalling past things out of the oblivion in which they seem to lie. How solemn and miserable it is to defile it with the pictures of things evil! Many a man in his later years has tried to 'turn over a new leaf,' and has never been able to get the filth out of his memory, for it has been printed on the old page in such strong colours that it shines through. I beseech you all, and especially you young people, to keep yourselves 'innocent of much transgression,' and 'simple concerning evil'—to make your memories like an illuminated missal with fair saints and calm angels bordering the holy words, and not an *Illustrated Police News*. Probably there is no real oblivion. Each act sinks in as if forgotten, gets overlaid with a multitude of others, but it is there, and memory will one day bring it to us.

And all sin pollutes the imagination. It is a miserable thing to have one's mind full of ugly foul forms painted on the inner walls of our chamber of imagery, like the hideous figures in some heathen temple, where gods of lust and murder look out from every inch of space on the walls.

(*c*) All wrong-doing writes indelible records on the conscience. It does so partly by sophisticating it—the sensibility to right and wrong being weakened by every evil act, as a cold in the head takes away the sense of smell. It brings on colour-blindness to some extent. One does not know how far one may go towards 'Evil! be thou my good'—or how far towards incapacity of distinguishing evil. But at all events the tendency of each sin is in that direction. So conscience may become seared, though perhaps never so completely as that there are no intervals when it speaks. It may long lie dormant, as Vesuvius did, till great trees grow on the floor of the crater, but all the while the communication with the central fires is open, and one day they will burst out.

The writing may be with invisible ink, but it will be legible one day. So, then, all this solemn writing on the heart is done by ourselves. What are you writing? There is a presumption in it of a future retribution, when you will have to read your autobiography, with clearer light and power of judging yourselves. At any rate there is retribution now, which is described by many metaphors, such as sowing and reaping, drinking as we have brewed, and others—but this one of indelible writing is not the least striking.

Sin is graven deep on sinful men's worship.

The metaphor here is striking and not altogether clear. The question rises whether the altars are idolatrous altars, or Jehovah's. If the former, the expression may mean simply that the Jews' idolatry, which was their sin, was conspicuously displayed in these altars, and had, as it were, its most flagrant record in their sacrifices. The altar was the centre point of all heathen and

Old Testament worship, and altars built by sinners were the most conspicuous evidences of their sins.

So the meaning would be that men's sin shapes and culminates in their religion; and that is very true, and explains many of the profanations and abominations of heathenism, and much of the formal worship of so-called Christianity.

For instance, a popular religion which is a mere Deism, a kind of vague belief in a providence, and in a future state where everybody is happy, is but the product of men's sin, striking out of Christianity all which their sin makes unwelcome in it. The justice of God, punishment, sinfulness of sin, high moral tone, are all gone. And the very horns of their altars are marked with the signs of the worshippers' sin.

But the 'altars' may be God's altars, and then another idea will come in. The horns of the altar were the places where the blood of the sacrifice was smeared, as token of its offering to God. They were then a part of the ritual of propitiation. They had, no doubt, the same meaning in the heathen ritual. And so regarded, the metaphor means that a sense of the reality of sin shapes sacrificial religion.

There can be no doubt that a very real conviction of sin lies at the foundation of much, if not all, of the system of sacrifices. And it is a question well worth considering whether a conviction so widespread is not valid, and whether we should not see in it the expression of a true human need which no mere culture, or the like, will supply.

At all events, altars stand as witnesses to the consciousness of sin. And the same thought may be applied to much of the popular religion of this day. It

may be ineffectual and shallow but it bears witness to a consciousness of evil. So its existence may be used in order to urge profounder realisation of evil on men. You come to worship, you join in confessions, you say 'miserable sinners'—do you mean anything by it? If all that be true, should it not produce a deeper impression on you?

But another way of regarding the metaphor is this. The horns of the altar were to be touched with the blood of propitiation. But look! the blood flows down, and after it has trickled away, there, deep carven on the horns, still appears the sin, *i.e.* the sin is not expiated by the sinner's sacrifice. Jeremiah is then echoing Isaiah's word, 'Bring no more vain oblations.' The picture gives very strikingly the hopelessness, so far as men are concerned, of any attempt to blot out this record. It is like the rock-cut cartouches of Egypt on which time seems to have no effect. There they abide deep for ever. Nothing that we can do can efface them. 'What I have written, I have written.' Pen-knives and detergents that we can use are all in vain.

II. Sin's writing may be erased, and another put in its place.

The work of Christ, made ours by faith, blots it out.

(*a*) Its influence on conscience and the sense of guilt. The accusations of conscience are silenced. A red line is drawn across the indictment, or, as Colossians has it, it is 'nailed to the cross.' There is power in His death to set us free from the debt we owe.

(*b*) Its influence on memory. Christ does not bring oblivion, but yet takes away the remorse of remembrance. Faith in Christ makes memory no longer a record which we blush to turn over, or upon which we

gloat with imaginative delight in guilty pleasures past, but a record of our shortcomings that humbles us with a penitence which is not pain, but serves as a beacon and warning for the time to come. He who has a clear beam of memory on his backward track, and a bright light of hope on his forward one, will steer right.

(*c*) Its influence on character.

We attain new hopes and tastes. 'We become epistles of Christ known and read of all men,' like palimpsests, Homer or Ovid written over with the New Testament gospels or epistles.

Christ's work is twofold, erasure and rewriting. For the one, 'I will blot out as a cloud their transgressions.' None but He can remove these. For the other, 'I will put My law into their minds and will write it on their hearts.' He can impress all holy desires on, and can put His great love and His mighty spirit into, our hearts.

So give your hearts to Him. They are all scrawled over with hideous and wicked writing that has sunk deep into their substance. Graven as if on rock are your sins in your character. *Your* worship and sacrifices will not remove them, but Jesus Christ can. He died that you might be forgiven, He lives that you may be purified. Trust yourself to Him, and lean all your sinfulness on His atonement and sanctifying power, and the foul words and bad thoughts that have been scored so deep into your nature will be erased, and His own hand will trace on the page, poor and thin though it be, which has been whitened by His blood, the fair letters and shapes of His own likeness. Do not let your hearts be the devil's copybooks for all evil things to scrawl their names there, as boys do on the walls, but spread them before Him, and ask Him to make them clean and write

upon them His new name, indicating that you now belong to another, as a new owner writes his name on a book that he has bought.

THE HEATH IN THE DESERT AND THE TREE BY THE RIVER

'He shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited. . . . He shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.'—JER. xvii. 6, 8.

THE prophet here puts before us two highly finished pictures. In the one, the hot desert stretches on all sides. The fierce 'sunbeams like swords' slay every green thing. The salt particles in the soil glitter in the light. No living creature breaks the melancholy solitude. It is a 'waste land where no one came, or hath come since the making of the world.' Here and there a stunted, grey, prickly shrub struggles to live, and just manages not to die. But it has no grace of leaf, nor profitableness of fruit; and it only serves to make the desolation more desolate.

The other carries us to some brimming river, where everything lives because water has come. The pictures are coloured by Eastern experience. For in those lands more than beneath our humid skies and weaker sunshine, the presence or absence of running water makes the difference between barrenness and fertility. Dipping their boughs in the sparkling current, and driving their roots through the moist soil, the bordering trees lift aloft their pride of foliage and bear fruits in their season.

So, says Jeremiah, the two pictures represent two sets of men; the one, he who diverts from their true object

his heart-capacities of love and trust, and clings to creatures and to men, 'making flesh his arm and departing from the living God'; the other, he who leans the whole weight of his needs and cares and sins and sorrows upon God. We can make choice of which shall be the object of our trust, and according as we choose the one or the other, the experience of these vivid pictures will be ours.

Let me briefly, then, draw out the points of contrast in these two companion sketches.

I. The one is in the desert, the other by the river.

Underneath the pictures there lies this thought, that the direction of a man's trust determines the whole cast of his life, because it determines, as it were, the soil in which he grows. We can alter our *habitat*. The plant is fixed; but 'I saw men as trees'—yes! but as 'trees *walking*.' We can walk, and can settle where we shall be rooted and whence we shall draw our inspiration, our confidence, our security. The man that chooses—for it is a matter of choice—to trust in any creature thereby wills, though he does not know it, that he shall dwell in a 'salt land and not inhabited.' The man that chooses to cast his whole self into the arms of God, and in a paroxysm of self-distrust to realise the divine helpfulness and presence, that man will soon know that he is 'planted by the river.'

Now, the poor, little dusty shrub in the desert, whose very leaves have been modified into prickles, is fit for the desert, and is as much at home there as are the willows by the water-courses with their lush vegetation in their moist bed. But if a *man* makes that fatal choice which so many of us are making, of shutting out God from his confidence and his love, and squandering these upon earth and upon creatures, he is as fatally out of harmony

with the place which he has chosen for himself, and as much away from his natural soil, as a tropical plant would be amongst the snows of Arctic glaciers, or a water-lily in the Sahara.

Considering all that I am and need, what and where is my true home and the soil in which I can grow securely, and fear no evil? Brethren, there is only one answer to that question. The very make of a man's spirit points to God, and to God alone, as the natural place for him to root and grow in. You, I, the poorest and humblest of men, will never be right, never feel that we are in our native soil, and compassed with the appropriate surroundings, until we have laid our hearts and our hands on the breast of God, and rested ourselves on Him. Not more surely do gills and fins proclaim that the creature that has them is meant to roam through the boundless ocean, nor the anatomy and wings of the bird witness more plainly to its destination to soar in the open heavens than the make of your spirits testifies that God, and none less or lower, is your portion. We are built for God, and unless we recognise and act upon that conviction, we are like the prickly shrub in the desert, whatever good may be around us; and if we do recognise and act upon it, whatever parched ground may seem to stretch on all sides, there will be soil moist enough for us to draw refreshment and vitality from it.

If that be so, brethren, what insanity the lives of multitudes of us are! As well might bees try to suck honey from a vase of wax flowers as we to draw what we need from creatures, from ourselves, from visible and material things.

What would you business men think of some one who went and sold out all his stock of Government or other

sound securities, and then flung the proceeds down a hole in South Africa, out of which no gold will ever come? He would be about as wise as are the people who fancy that these hearts of theirs will ever be at home except they find a home in God.

Where else will you find love that will never fail, nor change, nor die? Where else will you find an object for the intellect that will yield inexhaustible material of contemplation and delight? Where else infallible direction for the will? Where else shall weakness find unfailing strength, or sorrow, adequate consolation, or hope, certain fulfilment, or fear, a safe hiding-place? Nowhere besides. Oh! then, brethren, do, I beseech you, turn away your heart's confidence and love from earth and creatures; for until the roots of your life go down into God, and you draw your life from Him, you are not in your right soil.

II. The one can take in no real good; the other can fear no evil.

One verse of our text says, 'He shall not see when good cometh'; the other one, according to our Authorised Version, 'He shall not see when heat cometh.' But a very slight alteration of one word in the original gives a better reading, which is adopted in the Revised Version, where we have, 'and shall not fear when heat cometh.' That alteration is obviously correct, because there follows immediately a parallel clause, 'and shall not be careful'—or anxious—'in the year of drought.' In both these clauses the metaphor of the tree is a little let go; and the man who is signified by it comes rather more to the front than in the remainder of the picture. But that is quite natural.

So look at these two simple thoughts for a moment.

He whose trust is set upon creatures is thereby disabled from recognising what is his highest good. His judgment is perverted. *There* is the explanation of the fact that men are contented with the partial and evanescent blessedness that may be drawn from human loves and companionship and material things. It is because they have gone blind, and the false direction of their confidence has put out their eyes. And if any of my hearers are living careless about God, and all that comes from Him, and perfectly contented with that which they find in this visible, diurnal sphere, that is not because they have the good which they need, but because they do not know that good when they see it, and have lost the power of discerning what is really for their benefit and blessedness.

There is nothing sadder in this world than the conspiracy into which men seem to have entered to ignore the highest good, and to profess themselves contented with the lowest. I remember a rough parable of Luther's—the roughness of which may be pardoned for the force and vividness of it—which bears on this matter. He tells how a company of swine were offered all manner of dainty and refined foods, and how, with a unanimous swinish grunt, they answered that they preferred the warm, reeking 'grains' from the mash-tub. The illustration is coarse, but it is not an unfair representation of the choice that some of us are making.

'He cannot see when good cometh.' God comes, and I would rather have some more money. God comes, and I prefer some woman's love. God comes, and I would rather have a prosperous business. God comes, and I prefer beer. So I might go the whole round. The man that cannot see good when it is there before his face, because the false direction of his confidence has blinded his

eyes, cannot open his heart to it. It comes, but it does not come *in*. It surrounds him, but it does not enter into him. You are plunged, as it were, in a sea of possible felicity, which will be yours if your heart's direction is towards God, and the surrounding ocean of blessedness has as little power to fill your heart as the sea has to enter some hermetically sealed flask, dropped into the middle of the Atlantic. 'He cannot see when good cometh.' Blind, blind, blind! are multitudes of us.

Turn to the other side. 'He shall not fear when heat cometh,' which is evil in those Eastern lands, 'and shall not be careful in the year of drought.' The tree, that sends its roots towards a river that never fails, does not suffer when all the land is parched. The man who has driven his roots into God, and is drawing from that deep source what is needful for his life and fertility, has no occasion to dread any evil, nor to gnaw his heart with anxiety as to what he is to do in parched days. Troubles may come, but they do not go deeper than the surface. It may be all cracked and caked and dry, 'a thirsty land where no water is,' and yet deep down there may be moisture and coolness.

Faith, which is trust, and fear are opposite poles. If a man has the one, he can scarcely have the other in vigorous operation. He that has his trust set upon God does not need to dread anything except the weakening or the paralysing of that trust; for so long as it lasts it is a talisman which changes evil into good, the true philosopher's stone which transmutes the baser metals into gold; and, so long as it lasts, God's shield is round him and no evil can befall him.

Brethren, if our trust is in God, it is unworthy of it and of us to fear, for all things are His, and there is no

evil in evil as men call it, so long as it does not draw away our hearts from our Father and our Hope. Therefore, he that fears let him trust; he that trusts let him not be afraid. He that sets his heart and anchors his hopes of safety on any except God, let him be afraid, for he is in a very stern world, and if he is not fearful he is a fool.

So the direction of our trust, if it is right, shuts all real evil out from us, and if it is wrong, shuts us out from all real good.

III. The one is bare, the other clothed with the beauty of foliage.

The word which is translated 'heat' has a close connection with, if it does not literally mean, 'naked' or 'bare.' Probably, as I have said, it designates some inconspicuously leaved desert shrub, the particular species not being ascertainable or a matter of any consequence. Leaves, in Scripture, have a recognised symbolical meaning. 'Nothing but leaves' in the story of the fig-tree meant only beautiful outward appearance, with no corresponding outcome of goodness of heart, in the shape of fruit. So I may venture here to draw a distinction between leafage and fruit, and say that the one points rather to a man's character and conduct as lovely in appearance, and in the other as morally good and profitable.

This is the lesson of these two clauses—misdirected confidence in creatures strips a man of much beauty of character, and true faith in God adorns a soul with a leafy vesture of loveliness. Now, I have no doubt that there start up in your minds at once two objections to that statement: first, that a great many godless men do present fair and attractive features of character; and secondly, that a great many Christian men do not. I

admit both things frankly, and yet I say that, for the highest good, the perfect crowning beauty of any human character, this is needed, that it should cling to God. 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report' lack their supreme excellence, the diamond on the top of the royal crown, the glittering gold on the summit of the campanile, unless there is in them a distinct reference to God.

I believe that I am speaking to some who would not profess themselves to be religious men, and who yet are truly desirous of cultivating in their character the Fair and the Good. To them I would venture to say—brethren, you will never be so completely, so refinedly, so truly, graceful as you might be, unless the roots of your character 'are hid with Christ in God.'

> 'A servant with this clause
> Makes drudgery divine,'

said good old George Herbert. And any act, however humble, on which the light from God falls, will gleam with a lustre else unattainable, like some piece of broken glass in the furrows of a ploughed field.

Sure I am that if we Christian people had a deeper faith, we should have fairer lives. And I beseech you, my fellow-believers in Jesus Christ, not to supply the other side with arguments against Christianity, by showing that it is possible for a man to say and to suppose that he sets his heart on God, and yet to bear but little leafage of beauty or grace of character. Goodness is beauty; beauty is goodness. Both are to be secured by communion and union with Him who is fairer than the children of men. Dip your roots into the fountain of life—it is the fountain of beauty as well as of life, and your lives will be green.

IV. Lastly, the one is sterile, the other fruitful.

I admit, as before, that this statement often seems to be contradicted, both by the good works of godless men, and by the bad works of godly ones. But for all that, I would urge you to consider that the only works of men worth calling 'fruit,' if regard is had to their capacities, relations, and obligations, are those done as the outcome and consequence of hearts trusting in the Lord. The rest of the man's activities may be busy and multiplied, and, from the point of view of a godless morality, many may be fair and good; but if we think of him as being destined, as his chief end, 'to glorify God, and (so) to enjoy Him for ever,' what correspondence between such a creature and acts that are done without reference to God can there ever be? They are not worth calling 'fruit.' At the most they are 'wild grapes,' and there comes a time when they will be tested and the axe laid to the root of the trees, and these imperfect deeds will shrivel up and disappear.

Trust will certainly be fruitful. In so saying we are upon Christian ground, which declares that the outcome of faith is conduct in conformity with the will of Him in whom we trust, and that the productive principle of all good in man is confidence in God manifest to us in Jesus Christ.

So we have not to begin with work; we have to begin with character. 'Make the tree good,' and its fruit will be good. Faith will give power to bring forth such fruit; and faith will set agoing the motive of love which will produce it. Thus, dear brethren, we come back to this—the prime thing about a man is the direction which his trust takes. Is it to God? Then the tree is good; and its fruit will be good too. If you will trust your-

selves to 'God manifest in the flesh,' to Jesus Christ and His work for you and in you, then you will be as if 'planted by the rivers of water,' you will be able to receive into yourselves, and will receive, all good, and be masters of all evil, will exhibit graces of character else impossible, and will bring forth 'fruit that shall remain.' Separated from Him we are nothing, and can bring forth nothing that will stand the light of that last moment.

Brother, turn your trust to that dear Lord, and then you will have your 'fruit unto holiness, and the end shall be everlasting life,' when the transplanting season comes, and they that have been 'planted in the house of the Lord' below shall 'flourish in the courts of our God' above, and grow more green and fruitful, beside the 'river of the water of life that proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb.'

A SOUL GAZING ON GOD

'A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.'—JER. xvii. 12.

I MUST begin by a word or two of explanation as to the language of this passage. The word 'is' is a supplement, and most probably it ought to be omitted, and the verse treated as being, not a statement, but a series of exclamations. The next verse runs thus, 'O Lord! the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed'; and the most natural and forcible understanding of the words of my text is reached by connecting them with these following clauses: 'O Lord! the hope of Israel,' and, regarding the whole as one long exclamation of adoring contemplation, 'A glorious throne,' or '*Thou*

glorious throne, high from the beginning; the place of our sanctuary, O Lord! the hope of Israel.'

I. If we look at the words so, we have here, to begin with, a wonderful vision of what God is.

'A glorious throne,' or, as the original has it, 'a throne of glory,'—which is not quite the same thing—'high from the beginning, the place of our sanctuary.' There are three clauses. Now they all seem to me to have reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, which is taken, by a very natural figure of speech, as a kind of suggestive description of Him who is worshipped there. There is the same kind of use of the name of a place to stand for the person who occupies or inhabits it, in many familiar phrases. For instance, 'The Sublime Porte' is properly the name of a lofty gateway which belonged to the palace in Constantinople, and so has come to mean the Turkish Government if Government it can be called. So we talk of the 'Papal See' having done this or that, and scarcely remember that a 'see' is a bishop's seat, or, again, the decision of 'the Chair' is final in the House of Commons. Or, if you will accept a purely municipal parallel, if any one were told that 'the Town Hall' had issued a certain order, he would know that our authorities, the Mayor and Corporation, had decreed so and so. So, in precisely the same way here, the prophet takes the outward facts of the Temple as symbolising great and blessed spiritual thoughts of the God that filled the Temple with His own lustre.

'A glorious throne'—that is grand, but that is not what Jeremiah means—'A throne of glory' is the true rendering. And to what does that refer? Now, in the greater number of cases, you will find that in the Old Testament, where 'glory' is ascribed to God, the word

has a very distinct and specific meaning, viz. the light which was afterwards called the 'Shekinah,' and dwelt between the cherubim, and was the symbol of the divine presence and the assurance that that presence would be self-revealing and would manifest Himself to His people. So here the throne on which glory rests is what we call the *mercy-seat* within the veil, where, above the propitiatory table on which once a year the High Priest sprinkled the blood of sacrifice, and beneath which were shut up the tables of the covenant which constituted the bond between God and Israel, shone the Light in the midst of the darkness of the enclosed inner shrine, the token of the divine presence. The throned glory, the glory that reigns and rules as King in Israel, is the idea of the words before us. It is the same throne that a later writer in the New Testament speaks of when he says, 'Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace.' For that light of a manifested divine presence was no malign lustre that blinded or slew those who gazed upon it, but though no eye but that of the High Priest dared of old to look, yet he, the representative and, as it were, the concentration of the collective Israel, could stand, unshrinking and unharmed, before that piercing light, because he bore in his hand the blood of sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy-seat. So was it of old, but now we all can draw near, through the rent veil, and walk rejoicingly in the light of the Lord. His glory is grace; His grace is glory.

This, then, is the first of Jeremiah's great thoughts of God, and it means—'The Lord God omnipotent reigneth,' there is none else but He, and His will runs authoritative and supreme into all corners of the universe. But it is 'glory' that is throned. That is equivalent to the

declaration that our God has never spoken in secret, in the dark places of the earth, nor said to any seeking heart, 'Seek ye My face in vain.' For the light which shone in that Holy Place as His symbol, had for its message to Israel the great thought that, as the sun pours out its lustre into all the corners of its system, so He, by the self-communication which is inherent in His very nature, manifests Himself to every gazing eye, and is a God who is Light, 'and in whom is no darkness at all.'

But reigning glory is also redeeming grace. For the light of the bright cloud, which is the glory of the Lord, shines still, with no thunder in its depths, nor tempests in its bosom, above the mercy-seat, where spreads the blood of sprinkling by which Israel's sins are all taken away. Well may the prophet lift up his heart in adoring wonder, and translate the outward symbol into this great word, 'The throne of glory; Jehovah, the hope of Israel.'

Then the next clause is, I think, equally intelligible by the same process of interpretation—'High from the beginning.' It was a piece of the patriotic exaggeration of Israel's prophets and psalmists that they made much of the little hill upon which the Temple was set. We read of the 'hill of the Lord's house' being 'exalted above the tops of the mountains.' We read of it being a high hill, 'as the hill of Bashan.' And though to the eye of sense it is a very modest elevation, to the eye of faith it was symbolical of much. Jeremiah felt it to be a material type, both of the elevation and of the stable duration of the God whom he would commend to Israel's and to all men's trust. 'High from the beginning,' separated from all creatural limitation and lowness, He

whose name is the Most High, and on whose level no other being can stand, towers above the lowness of the loftiest creature, and from that inaccessible height He sends down His voice, like the trumpet from amidst the darkness of Sinai, proclaiming, 'I am God, and there is none beside Me.' Yet while thus 'holy'—that is, separate from creatures—He makes communion with Himself possible to us, and draws near to us in Christ, that we in Christ may be made nigh to Him.

And the loftiness involves, necessarily, timeless and changeless Being; so that we can turn to Him, and feel Him to be 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' No words are needed, and no human words are anything but tawdry attempts to elaborate, which only result in weakening, these two great thoughts. 'High —from the beginning.'

The last of this series of symbols, even more plainly than the other two, refers originally to the Temple upon the hill of Zion; and symbolically, to the God who filled the Temple. He is 'the place of our sanctuary.' That is as though the prophet would point, as the wonderful climax of all, to the fact that He of whom the former things were true should yet be accessible to our worship; that, if I might so say, our feet could tread the courts of the great Temple; and we draw near to Him who is so far above the loftiest, and separate from all the magnificences which Himself has made, and who yet is 'our sanctuary,' and accessible to our worship.

Ay! and more than that—'Lord! Thou hast been our *dwelling-place* in all generations.' In old days the Temple was more than a place of worship. It was a place where a man coming had, according to ancient custom, guest rights with God; and if he came into the Temple

of the Most High as to an asylum, he dwelt there safe and secure from avengers or foes.

'The place of our sanctuary,' then, declares that God Himself, like some ancestral dwelling-place in which generation after generation of fathers and children have abode, whence they have been carried, and where their children still live, is to all generations their home and their fortress. The place of our sanctuary implies access to the inaccessibly High, communion with the infinitely Separate, security and abode in God Himself. He that dwelleth in God dwelleth in peace. These, then, are the points of the prophet's vision of God.

II. Note, further, the soul rapt in meditation and this vision of God.

To me, this long-drawn-out series of linked clauses without grammatical connection, this succession of odoring exclamations of rapture, wonder, and praise, is very striking. It suggests the manner in which we should vivify all our thoughts of God, by turning them into material for devout reverence; awe-struck, considering meditation. There is nothing told us in the Bible about God simply in order that we may know it. It is all meant to be fuel to the fire of our divine affection; to kindle in us the sentiments of faith and love and rapturous adoration. It is easy to know the theology of the Old and the New Testaments, and a man may rattle over the catalogue of the divine 'attributes,' as they are called, with perfect accuracy, and never be a hair the better for knowing all of them. So I urge, on you and on myself, the necessity of warming our thoughts and kindling our conceptions of what God is until they melt us into fluidity and adoration and love.

I believe that there are few things which we Chris-

tian people more lack in this generation, and by the lack of which we suffer more, than the comparative decay of the good old habit of frequent and patient meditation on the things that we most surely believe. We are so busy in adding to our stock of knowledge, in following out to their latest consequence the logical effects of our Christianity, and in defending it, or seeking to be familiar with the defences, against modern assaults, or in practical work on its behalf, that the last thing that a great many of us do is to feed upon the truth which we know already. We should be like ruminant animals who first crop the grass—which, being interpreted, means, get Scripture truth into our heads—and then chew the cud, which being interpreted is, then put these truths through a second process by meditation on them, so that they may turn into nourishment and make flesh. 'He that eateth Me,' said Jesus Christ (and He used there the word which is specially applied to rumination), 'shall live by Me.' It does us no good to know that God is 'the Throne of Glory, high from the beginning, the place of our sanctuary,' unless we turn theology into devotion by meditation upon it. 'Suffer the word of exhortation'—in busy, great communities like ours, where we are all driven so hard, there is need for some voices sometimes to be lifted up in pressing upon Christian people the duty of quiet rumination upon the truths that they have.

III. We may see in our text, further, the meditative soul going out to grasp God thus revealed, as its portion and hope.

As I have already said, the text is best understood as part of a series of exclamations which extends into the following verse. If we take account of the whole series,

and regard the subsequent part of it as led up to, by the part which is our text, we get an important thought as to what should be the outcome of the truths concerning God, and of our meditative contemplation of them.

My relation to these truths is not exhausted even when I have meditated upon them, and they have touched me into a rapture of devotion. I can conceive that to have been done, and yet the next necessary step not to have been taken. What is that step? The next verse tells us, when it goes on to exclaim, 'O Lord! *the hope of Israel.*' I must cast myself upon Him by faith as my only hope, and turn away from all other confidences which are vain and impotent. So we are back upon that familiar Christian ground, that the bond which knits a man to God, and by which all that God is becomes that man's personal property, and available for the security and the shaping of his life, is the simple flinging of himself into God's arms, in sure and certain trust. Then, every one of these characteristics of which I have been speaking will contribute its own special part to the serenity, the security, the godlikeness, the blessedness, the righteousness, the strength of the man who thus trusts.

But such confidence which makes all these things my own possessions, which makes Him 'a throne of glory,' to which I have access; which makes Him a place in which I dwell by this exercise of personal faith; which makes Him my hope, has for its other side the turning away from all other grounds of confidence and security. The subsequent context tells us how wise it is thus to turn away, and what folly it is to make anything else our hope except that 'throne of glory.' 'They that depart from Me shall be written in the earth,' because 'they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living

waters.' If we say, 'O Lord! Thou art my hope,' we shall have the 'anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, which entereth within the veil,' and fixes on Him who is within it, the throned Grace between the cherubim, our Brother and our Hope. So we may dwell in God, and from the secure height of our house look down serenely on impotent foes, and never know the bitterness of vain hopes, nor remove from the safe asylum of our home in God.

TWO LISTS OF NAMES

'They that depart from Me shall be written in the earth.'—JER. xvii. 13.
'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'—LUKE x. 20.

A NAME written on earth implies that the bearer of the name belongs to earth, and it also secondarily suggests that the inscription lasts but for a little while. Contrariwise, a name written in heaven implies that its bearer belongs to heaven, and that the inscription will abide.

We find running throughout Scripture the metaphor of books in which men's names are written. Moses thought of a book which God has written, and in which his name was enrolled. A psalmist speaks of the 'book of the living,' and Isaiah of those who are 'written among the living in Jerusalem.' Ezekiel threatens the prophets who speak lies in Jehovah's name that they 'shall not be written in the writing of the house of Israel.' The Apocalypse has many references to the book which is designated as 'the Lamb's book of life,' and which is opened at the final judgment along with the books in which each man's life-history is written, and only 'they who are written in the Lamb's book of life' enter into the city that comes down out of heaven.

I. The principle on which the two lists are made up.

It is commonly supposed that the idea of unconditional predestination is implied in the writing of the names in the book of life. There is nothing in the figure itself to lead to that, and the text from Jeremiah suggests, on the contrary, that the voluntary attitude of men to God determines their being or not being inscribed in the book of heaven, since it is 'they who depart from God' whose 'names are written on earth.'

Then, since in the New Testament the book of life is called 'the Lamb's,' we are led to think of Christ as writing in it, and hence of our faith in Him as being the condition of enrolling our names.

II. The significance of the lists.

They are lists of the living and of the dead.

True life is in fellowship with God. The other is the register of the burials in a graveyard.

They are lists of the citizens of two cities.

The idea is that the one class have relations and affinities with the celestial, are 'fellow-citizens with the saints,' and have heaven as their metropolis, their mother city. Therefore they are but as aliens here, and should not wish to be naturalised. The other class are citizens of the earthly, belonging to the present, with all their thoughts and desires bounded by this visible diurnal sphere.

They are lists of those who shall be forgotten, and their works annihilated, and of those who shall be remembered and their work crowned.

The names written on earth are swiftly obliterated, like a child's scrawl on the sand which is washed away by the next tide, or covered up by the next storm that blows about the sand-hills. What a contrast is that of

the names written on the heavens, high up above all earthly mutations!

In one sense oblivion soon seizes on us all. In another none of us is ever forgotten by God, but good and bad alike live in His thought. Still this idea of a special remembrance has place, as suggesting that, however unnoticed or forgotten on earth, God's children live in the true 'Golden Book.' Their names are in the book of life. 'Of so much fame, in heaven expect the meed.' Ay, and as, too, suggesting how brief after all is the honour that comes from men.

Also, there will be annihilation or perpetuation of their life's work. Nothing lasts but the will of God. Men who live godless lives are engaged in true Sisyphean labour. They are running counter to the whole stream of things, and what can be left at the end but frustrated endeavours covered with a gloomy pall?

Is your life to be wasted?

They are lists of those who are accepted in judgment, and of those who are not.

Rev. xx. 12, 15; xxi. 27.

The books of men's lives are to be opened, and also the book of life. What is written in the former can only bring condemnation. If our names are written in the latter, then He will 'confess our names before His Father and the holy angels.' And He will joyfully inscribe them there if we say to Him, like the man in *Pilgrim's Progress*, 'Set down my name.' He will write them not only there, but on the palms of His hands and the tablets of His heart.

YOKES OF WOOD AND OF IRON

'Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.'—JER. xxviii. 13.

I SUPPOSE that I had better begin by a word of explanation as to the occasion of this saying. One king of Judah had already been carried off to Babylon, and the throne refilled by his brother, a puppet of the conquerors. This shadow of a king, with the bulk of the nation, was eager for revolt. Jeremiah had almost single-handed to stem the tide of the popular wish. He steadfastly preached submission, not so much to Nebuchadnezzar as to God, who had sent the invaders as chastisement. The lesson was a difficult one to learn, and the people hated the teacher. In the Jerusalem of Jeremiah's day, as in other places and at other times, a love of country which is not blind to its faults and protests against a blatant militarism, was scoffed at as 'unpatriotic,' 'playing into the hands of the enemy,' 'seeking peace at any price,' whilst an insane eagerness to rush to arms without regard to resources or righteousness was called a 'spirited foreign policy.' So Jeremiah had plenty of enemies.

He had adopted a strange way of enforcing his counsel, which would be ridiculous to-day, but was natural and impressive then and there. He constantly for months went about with an ox-yoke on his neck, as a symbol of the submission which he advocated. One day, in the temple, before a public assembly, a certain Hananiah, a member of the opposite faction, made a fierce attack on the prophet and his teaching, and uttered a counter-prophecy to the effect that, in two years, the

foreign invasion would be at an end, and all would be as it used to be. Our prophet answered very quietly, saying in effect, 'I hope to God that it may be true; the event will show.' And then Hananiah, encouraged by his meekness, proceeded to violence, tore the yoke off his shoulders and snapped it in two, reiterating his prophecy. Then Jeremiah went away home.

Soon after, the voice which he knew to be God's, and not his own thoughts, spoke within him, and gave a much sharper answer. God declared, through Jeremiah, the plain truth that, for a tiny kingdom like Judah to perk itself up in the face of a world-conquering power like Babylon, could only bring down greater severity from the conqueror. And then he declared that Hananiah, for rebellion—not against Babylon, but against God, the true King of Israel—would be taken from the earth. He died in a couple of months.

My text forms the first word of this divine message. I have nothing more to do with its original application. It gives a picturesque setting to a very impressive and solemn truth; very familiar, no doubt, but none the less because of its familiarity needing to be dinned into people's ears. It is that to throw off legitimate authority is to bind on a worse tyranny. To some kind of yoke all of us must bend our necks, and if we slip them out we do not thereby become independent, but simply bring upon ourselves a heavier pressure of a harder bondage. The remainder of my remarks will simply go to illustrate that principle in two or three cases of ascending importance. I begin at the bottom.

I. We have the choice between the yoke of law and the iron yoke of lawlessness.

We all know that society could not be held together

without some kind of restraints upon what is done, and some stimulus to do what is apt to be neglected. Even a band of brigands, or a crew of pirates, must have some code. I have read somewhere that the cells in a honeycomb are circles squeezed by the pressure of the adjacent cells into the hexagonal shape which admits of contiguity. If they continued circles there would be space and material lost, and no complete continuity. So, in like manner, you cannot keep five men together without some mutual limitations which are shaped into a law. Now, as long as a man keeps inside it, he does not feel its pressure. A great many of us, for instance, who are in the main law-abiding people, do not ever remember that there is such a thing as restrictions upon our licence, or as obligations to perform certain duties; for we never think either of taking the licence or of shirking the duties. The yoke that is accepted ceases to press. Once let a man step outside, and what then? Why, then, he is an outlaw; and the rough side of the law is turned to him, and all possible terrors, which people within the boundary have nothing to do with, gather themselves together and frown down upon him. The sheep that stops inside the pasture is never torn by the barbed wires of the fence. If you think of the life of a criminal, with all its tricks and evasions, taking 'every bush to be an officer,' as Shakespeare says; or as the first of the brood who was the type of them all said, 'Every man that seeth me shall kill me': if you think of the sword that hangs over the head of every law-breaker, and which he knows is hanging by a hair; if you think of men in counting-houses who have manipulated the books of the firm, and who durst not be away from their desks for a day lest all should come to light; and if you

think of the punishment that follows sooner or later, you will see that it is better to bear the light yoke of the law than the heavy yoke of crime. Some men buy their ruin very dearly.

So much for the individual. But there is another aspect of this same principle on which I venture to say a word, although it is only a word, in passing. I do not suppose that there are many of my hearers who are likely to commit overt breaches of the law. But there are a great many of us who are apt to neglect the obligations of citizenship. In a community like ours, laziness, fastidiousness, absorption in our own occupations, and a number of other more or less reputable reasons, tempt many to stand aloof from the plain imperative obligations of every citizen in a free country. Every man who thus neglects to do his part for the common weal does his part in handing over the rule of the community to the least worthy. You will find—as you see in some democratic countries to-day, where the cultivated classes, and the classes with the sternest morality, have withdrawn in disgust from the turmoil—the mob having the upper hand, the least worthy scrambling into high places, and the community suffering, and bearing a heavier yoke, by reason of the unwillingness of some to bear the yoke and do the duty of a citizen. Vice lifts up its head, morality is scouted, self-interest is pursued unblushingly, and the whole tone of public opinion is lowered. Christian men and women, remember that you are members of a community, and you bear the yoke of responsibility therefore; and if you do not discharge your obligation, then you will have a heavier burden still to bear.

I need not remind you, I suppose, of how this same

thesis—that we have to choose between the yoke of law and the iron yoke of lawlessness—is illustrated in the story of almost all violent revolutions. They run the same course. First a nation rises up against intolerable oppression, then revolution devours its own children, and the scum rises to the top of the boiling pot. Then comes, in the language of the picturesque historian of the French Revolution, the type of them all—then comes at the end 'the whiff of grapeshot' and the despot. First the government of a mob, and then the tyranny of an emperor, crush the people that shake off the yoke of reasonable law. That is my first point.

II. Let me take a higher illustration;—we have to choose between the yoke of virtue and the iron yoke of vice.

We are under a far more spiritual and searching law than that written in any statute-book, or administered by any court. Every man carries within his own heart the court, the tribunal; the culprit and the judge. And here too, if law is not obeyed, the result is not liberty, but the slavery of lawlessness.

No man can ponder his own nature and make without feeling that on every fibre of him is stamped a great law which he is bound to obey, and that on every fibre of him is impressed the necessity of part of his nature coercing, restraining, or spurring other parts of it. For, if we take stock of ourselves, what do we find? The broad basis of the pyramid, as it were, is laid in the faculties nearest the earth, the appetites which are inseparable from our corporeal being, and these know nothing about right or wrong, but are utterly blind to such distinctions. Put a loaf before a hungry man, and his mouth waters, whether the loaf belongs to himself or whether it is inside a baker's window.

Then above these, as the next course of the pyramid, there are other desires, sentiments, affections, and emotions, less grossly sensuous than those of which I have been speaking, but still equally certain to be excited by the presence of their appropriate object, without any consideration of whether law is broken or kept in securing of it. Above these, which are, so to speak, branded on their very foreheads with the iron of slavery, stand certain faculties which are as clearly anointed to rule as the others are intended to serve. There is reason or intelligence, which is evidently meant to be eyes to these blind instincts and emotions of desire, and there is what we call the power of will, that stands like an engine-driver with his hand upon the lever which will either stop the engine or accelerate its revolutions. It says to passions and desires 'Go!' and they go; and, alas! it sometimes says 'Halt!' and they will not halt. Then there is conscience, which brings to light for every man something higher than himself. A great philosopher once said that the two sublimest things in the universe were the moral law and the starry heavens; and that law 'I ought' bends over us like the starry heavens with which he associated it. No man can escape from the pressure of duty, and on every man is laid, by his very make, the twofold obligation, first to look upwards and catch the behests of that solemn law, and then to turn his eyes and his strength inwards and coerce or spur, as the case may be, the powers of his nature, and rule the kingdom within himself.

Now, as long as a man lets the ruling parts of his nature guide the lower faculties, he feels comparatively no pressure from the yoke. But, if he once allows beggars to ride on horseback whilst princes walk—sense and ap-

petite and desire, and more or less refined forms of inclination, to take the place which belongs only to conscience interpreting duty—then he has exchanged the easy yoke for one that is heavy indeed.

What does a man do when, instead of loyally accepting the conditions of his nature, and bowing himself to serve the all-embracing and all-penetrating law of duty, he sets up inclination of any sort in its place? What does he do? I will tell you. He unships the helm; he flings compass and sextant overboard; he fires up the furnaces, and screws down the safety-valve, and says, 'Go ahead!' And what will be the end of that, think you? Either an explosion or a crash upon a reef; and you may take your choice of which is the better kind of death—to be blown up or to go down. Keep within the law of conscience, and let it govern all inclinations, and most of all the animal part of your nature; and you will feel little pressure, and no pain, from the yoke. Shake it off, and there is fulfilled in the disobedient man the threatening of my text, which rightly translated ought to be, 'Thou hast broken the yokes of wood, and thou *hast* made instead of them yokes of iron.'

For do you think it will be easy to serve the base-born parts of your nature, when you set them on the throne and tell them to govern you? Did you never hear of such a thing as a man's vices getting such a hold on him that, when his weakened will tried to shake them off, they laughed in his face and said, 'Here we are still'? Did you never hear of that other solemn truth—and have you never experienced how true it is?—that no man can say, 'I will let my inclination have its fling this once'? There are never 'this onces,' or very, very seldom. When you are glissading down a snowy Alpine slope,

you cannot stop when you like, though you strike your alpenstock ever so deep into the powdery snow. If you have started, away you must go. God be thanked! the illustration does not altogether apply, for a man can stop if he will repent, but he cannot stop unless he does. Did you never hear that a teaspoonful of narcotic to-day will have to be a tablespoonful in a week or two, to produce the same effect? Are there not plenty of men who have said with all the force that a weakened will has left in it, 'I will never touch a drop of drink again, as long as I live, God helping me'?—and they have gone down the street, and they have turned in, not at the first or the second public-house, but at the fourth or the fifth. Ah! brother, 'they promised them liberty, but they are the servants of corruption.' Fix this in your minds. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin,' of the sin that he commits. Do not put off the easy yoke of obedience to conscience and duty, or you will find that there is an iron one, with many a sharp point in its unpolished surface rubbing into your skin and wounding your shoulders. 'It's wiser to be good than bad. It's safer to be meek than fierce.' 'Thou hast broken the yokes of wood'; it is not difficult to do that; 'thou hast made instead of them yokes of iron.' That is my second point.

III. Lastly, we have the choice between the yoke of Christ and the iron yoke of godlessness.

You may think that to be a very harsh saying, and much too vehement an antithesis. Let me vindicate it according to my own belief in a sentence or two. It seems to me that for civilised and cultivated Europe at this day, the choice lies between accepting Jesus Christ as the *Revealer* of God, or wandering away out into the

wastes of uncertainty, or as they call it nowadays, agnosticism and doubt. I believe myself, and I venture to state it here—though there is not time to do more than state it—that no form of what is now called Theism, which does not accept the historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the 'master-light of all our seeing,' will ever be able to sustain itself permanently in the face of present currents of opinion. If you do not take Christ for your Teacher, you are handed over either to the uncertainty of your own doubts, or to pinning your faith to some man and enrolling yourself as a disciple who is prepared to swallow down whole whatsoever the rabbi may say, and so giving to him what you will not give to Jesus; or else you will sink back into utter indolence and carelessness about the whole matter; or else you will go and put your belief and your soul into the hands of a priest, and shut your eyes and open your mouth and take whatever tradition may choose to send you. The one refuge from all these, as I believe, is to go to Him and learn of Him, and so take His yoke upon your shoulders.

But, let me say further, it is better to obey Christ's *commandments* than to set ourselves against them. For if we will take His will for our law, and meekly assume the yoke of loyal and loving obedience to Him, the door into an earthly paradise is thrown open to us. His yoke is easy, not because its prescriptions and provisions lower the standard of righteousness and morality, but because love becomes the motive; and it is always blessed to do that which the Beloved desires. When 'I will' and 'I ought' cover exactly the same ground, then there is no kind of pressure from the yoke. Christ's yoke is easy because, too, He gives the power to obey His command-

ments. His burden is such a burden (as I think one of the old fathers puts it) as sails are to a ship or wings to a bird. They add to the weight, but they carry that which carries them. So Christ's yoke bears the man that bears it. It is easy, too, because 'in,' and not only after or for, 'keeping of it there is great reward'; seeing that He commands nothing which is not congruous with the highest good, and bringing along with it the purest blessing. Instead of that yoke, what has the world to offer, or what do we get to dominate us, if we cast off Christ? Self, the old anarch self, and that is misery. To be self-ruled is to be self-destroyed.

There is no need that I should remind you of how it is better to accept Christ's *providences* than to kick against them. Sorrow to which we submit loses all its bitterness and much of its sadness. Kicking against the affliction makes its sharp point penetrate our limbs. The bird that will dash itself against the wires of its cage beats itself all bloody and torn. Let us take the providence and it ceases to be hard.

One last word;—we all carry an iron yoke upon our shoulders. For, hard as it is for us preachers to get our friends that listen to us to believe and realise it, 'We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' That yoke is on us all. And I, for my part, believe that no man by his own efforts can cast it off, but that the attempt to do so often brings greater strength to the sins that we seek to cast out, just as the more you mow the grass, the thicker and the stronger it grows. So I come with the great message which Jesus Christ Himself struck as the keynote and prelude of His whole ministry, when in the synagogue He said, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me . . . to preach deliverance to the cap-

tives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.' He, and He only, will break every yoke and let the oppressed go free. And then He addresses us, after He has done that, with the immortal words, the sweetness of whose sound, sweet as it is, is less than the sweetness of their sense: 'Take My yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest to your souls.' Oh, brother! will you not answer, 'O Lord! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds, and thereby bound me for ever to wear Thy yoke'; as the slave clings to his ransomer, and delights to serve him all the days of his life?

WHAT THE STABLE CREATION TEACHES

'If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever.'—JER. xxxi. 36.

THIS is the seal of the new covenant, which is to be made in days future to the prophet and his contemporaries, with the house of Israel and of Judah. That new covenant is referred to in Hebrews as the fundamental law of Christ's kingdom. Therefore we have the right to take to ourselves the promises which it contains, and to think of 'the house of Israel' and 'the seed of Jacob' as including us, 'though Abraham be ignorant of us.'

The covenant and its pledge are equally grand. The very idea of a covenant as applied to God is wonderful. It is meant to teach us that, from all the infinite modes of action possible to Him, He has chosen One; that He has, as it were, marked out a path for Himself, and confined the freedom of His will and the manifold omnipotences of His power to prescribed limits, that He has determined the course of His future action. It is meant to

teach us, too, the other grand thought that He has declared to us what that course is, not leaving us to learn it piecemeal by slow building up of conclusions about His mind from His actions as they come forth, but inversely telling us His mind and purpose in articulate and authentic words by which we are to interpret each successive work of His. He makes known His purposes. 'Before they spring forth I tell you of them.'

It is meant to teach us, too, that He regards Himself as bound by the declaration which He has made, so that we may rest secure on this strong foundation of His faithfulness and His truth, and for all doubts and fears find the sufficient cure in His own declaration: 'My covenant will I not break nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips.' No wonder that the dying king found the strength of his failing heart in the thought, 'He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.'

The weighty promises of this solemn bond of God's cover the whole ground of our spiritual necessities—forgiveness of sins, true, personal, direct acquaintance with God, an intercommunion of mutual possession between Him who is ours and us who are His, and an inward sanctification by which His precepts shall coincide with our desires. These are the blessings which He binds Himself to bestow.

And of this transcendent pact, the seal and guarantee is worthy. God descends to ratify a bond with man. By it He binds Himself to give all possible good for the soul. And to confirm it heaven and earth are called in. He points us to all that is august, stable, immense, inscrutable in the works of His hands, and bids us see there His pledge that He will be a faithful, covenant-keeping

God. Sun, moon and stars, heaven, earth and sea—'ye are My witnesses,' saith the Lord.

God's unchangeable love is the true lesson from the stable regularity of the universe. The tone in which Scripture speaks of external nature in all its parts is very remarkable, altogether peculiar. It does not take the æsthetic or the scientific, but the purely religious point of view.

I. The facts. All nature is directly the effect of God's will and power. 'He giveth,' 'He divideth' (v. 35).

The physical universe presents a spectacle of stable regularity.

This regularity is the consequence of sovereign, divine will. These ordinances are not laws of *nature*, but of God.

II. The use commonly made of the facts.

Ordinary unthinking worldliness sees nothing noticeable in them because they come uniformly. Earthquakes startle, but the firmness of the solid earth attracts no observation. God is thought to speak in the extraordinary, but most men do not hear His voice in the normal.

Scientific godlessness formularises this tendency into a system, and proclaims that laws are everything and God a mere algebraical x.

III. The lesson which they are meant to teach.

God's works are a revelation of God.

There is nothing in effect which is not in cause, and the stability of these ordinances carries our thoughts back to an unchanging Ordainer.

They witness to His constancy of purpose or will. His acts do not come from caprice, nor are done as experi-

ments, but are the stable expression of uniform and unchanging will.

They witness to His unfailing energy of power, which 'operates unspent' and is to-day as fresh as at creation's birth.

They witness to a single end pursued through all changes, and by all varieties of means. Darkness and light, sun rising and setting, storm and sunshine, summer and winter, all serve one end. As a horizontal thrust may give rise to opposite circular motions which all issue in working out an onward progress, so the various dealings of Providence with us are all adapted to 'work together,' and that 'for good.'

They witness that life, joy, beauty, flow from obedience.

Thus, then, these ordinances in their stability are witnesses. But they are inferior witnesses. The noblest revelation of the divine faithfulness and unchangeable purpose of good is in Jesus. And these witnesses will one day pass. Even now they have their changes, slow and unmarked by a short-lived man. Stars burn out, there have been violent convulsions, shocks and shatterings in the heavens, and a time comes, as even physical science predicts, when 'the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment,' but that to which they witnessed shall endure, 'My salvation shall be for ever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished.' The created lights grow dim and die out, but in 'the Father of lights' is 'no variableness, neither shadow that is cast by turning.'

Hence we see what our confidence should be. It should stand firm and changeless as the Covenant, and we should move in our orbits as the stars and hearken to

the voice of His word as do they. Let us see to it that we have faith to match His faithfulness, and that our confidence shall be firmer than the mountains, more stable than the stars.

WHAT THE IMMENSE CREATION TEACHES

'If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord.'—JER. xxxi. 37.

IN the former sermon we considered the previous verse as presenting the stability of creation as a guarantee of the firmness of God's gracious covenant. Now we have to consider these grand closing words which bring before us another aspect of the universe as a guarantee for another side of God's gracious character. The immensity of creation is a symbol of the inexhaustibleness of the forgiving love of God.

I. A word or two as to the fact here used as a symbol of the divine long-suffering.

The prophet had very likely no idea at all beyond the ordinary one that presents itself to the senses—a boundless vault above an endless plain on which we stand, deep, sunless foundations, the Titanic substructions on which all rests, going down who knows where, resting on who knows what. We may smile at the rude conception, but it will be well for us if we can get as vivid an impression of the fact as He had.

We thankfully avail ourselves of modern science to tell us something about the dimensions of this awful universe of ours. We learn to know that there are millions of miles between these neighbour orbs, that light which has been travelling for thousands of years may not yet have fallen on some portion of the mighty

whole, that the planetary masses of our system are but tiny specks in the whole, that every fresh stride which astronomical observation takes but opens up new nebulæ to be resolved, where suns and constellations and systems are dwarfed by distance into hazy brightness which hardly deserves the name of light. We know all this, and can find all about the distances in any book. So much for space. Then the geologist comes to bewilder us still more, with extension in time.

But while all this may serve to give definiteness to the impression, after all, perhaps, it is the eye alone, as it gazes, that really feels the impression. Astronomy is really a very prosaic science.

II. The effects which this immensity often produces on men.

Very commonly in old days it led to actual idolatry, bowing down before these calm, unreachable brightnesses. In our days it too often leads to forgetting God altogether, and not seldom to disbelief that man can be of any account in such a universe. We are told that the notions of a covenant, a redemption, or that God cares about us are presumptuous. We all know the talk of men who are so modestly conscious of their own insignificance that they rebuke God for saying that He loves us, and Christians for believing Him.

III. The true lesson.

The immensity of the material universe is for us a symbol of the infinity of God's long-suffering love.

The creation proceeds from a greater Creator. That gigantic and overwhelming magnitude, that hoary and immemorial age, that complicated and innumerable multitude of details, what less can they show than ONE Eternal and Infinite?

The immense suggests the infinite.

Granted that you cannot from the immense creation rise logically to the Infinite Creator, still the facts that the soul conceives that there is an infinite God, and is conscious of the spontaneous evoking of that thought by the contemplation of the immeasurable, are strong reasons for believing that it is a legitimate process of thought which hears the name of God thundered from the far-off depths of the silent heavens. The heavens cannot be measured, no plummet can reach to the deep foundations of the earth. We are surrounded by a universe which to our apprehensions is boundless. How much more so from expansions of our conceptions of celestial magnitudes since Jeremiah's days, and what is to be the lesson from that? That we are insignificant atoms in this mighty whole? that God is far away from us? that the material stretches so far that perhaps there is nothing beyond?

The thought of faith is that the material immensity teaches me my God's infinity, and especially His inexhaustible patience with us sinners. It teaches us the unfathomed depths of His gracious heart, and the abysses of His mysterious providence, and the unbounded sweep of His long-suffering forgiveness. His forgiving forbearance reaches further than the limits of the heavens. Not till these can be measured will it be exhausted, and the seed of Israel cast off for what they have done.

He, the Infinite Father, above all creation, mightier than it, is our true home, and living in Him we have an abode which can never be 'dissolved,' and above us stretch far-shining glories, unapproached masses of brightness, nebulæ of blessedness, spaces where the eye fails and the imagination faints. All is ours, our eter-

nal possession, the inexhaustible source of our joy. Astronomers tell of light which has been travelling for millenniums and has not yet reached this globe; but what is that to the flashing glories which through eternity shall pour on us from Him? So, then, our confidence should be firm and inexhaustible.

God has written wondrous lessons in His creation. But they are hieroglyphs, of which the key is lost, till we hear Christ and learn of Him. God has set His glories in the heavens and the earth is full of His mercy, but these are lesser gifts than that which contains them all and transcends them all, even His Son by whom He made the worlds, and—mightier still—by whom He redeemed man. God has written His mercy in the heavens and His faithfulness in the clouds, but His mercy and His faithfulness are more commended to us in Him who was before all things, and of whom it is written: 'As a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, but Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail.' God has confirmed the covenant of His love to us by the faithful witnesses in the heavens, but the love shall abide when they have perished. The heavens bend above us all, and over the head of every man the zenith stands. Every spot of this low earth is smiled upon by that serene apocalypse of the loving will of God. No lane is so narrow and foul in the great city, no spot is so bare and lonely in the waste desert, but that thither the sunlight comes, and there some patch of blue above beckons the downcast eye to look up. The day opens its broad bosom bathed in light, and shows the sun in the heavens, the Lord of light, to preach to us of the true light. The night opens deeper abysses and fills them with stars, to preach to us how fathomless and immense

His loving kindnesses and tender mercy are. They are witnesses to thee, dear friend, whatsoever thy heart, whatsoever thy sins, whatsoever thy memories. No iniquity can shut out God's forgiving love. You cannot build out the heavens. He will not be sent away; you cannot measure, you cannot conceive, you cannot exhaust, His pardoning love. No storms disturb that serene sky. It is always there, blazing down upon us unclouded with all its orbs. Trust Christ; and then as years roll on, you will find that infinite love growing ever greater to your loving eyes, and through eternity will move onwards in the happy atmosphere and boundless heaven of the inexhaustible, deep heart and changeless love of God.

A THREEFOLD DISEASE AND A TWOFOLD CURE.

'I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me.'—JER. xxxiii. 8.

JEREMIAH was a prisoner in the palace of the last King of Judah. The long, national tragedy had reached almost the last scene of the last act. The besiegers were drawing their net closer round the doomed city. The prophet had never faltered in predicting its fall, but he had as uniformly pointed to a period behind the impending ruin, when all should be peace and joy. His song was modulated from a saddened minor to triumphant jubilation. In the beginning of this chapter he has declared that the final struggles of the besieged will only end in filling the land with their corpses, and then, from that lowest depth, he soars in a burst of lyrical prophecy

conceived in the highest poetic style. The exiles shall return, the city shall be rebuilt, its desolate streets shall ring with hymns of praise and the voices of the bridegroom and the bride. The land shall be peopled with peaceful husbandmen, and white with flocks. There shall be again a King upon the throne; sacrifices shall again be offered. 'In those days, and at that time, will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David. . . . In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our righteousness.' That fair vision of the future begins with the offer of healing and cure, and with the exuberant promise of my text. The first thing to be dealt with was Judah's sin; and that being taken away, all good and blessing would start into being, as flowerets will spring when the baleful shadow of some poisonous tree is removed. Now, my text at first reading seems to expend a great many unnecessary words in saying the same thing over and over again, but the accumulation of synonyms not only emphasises the completeness of the promise, but also presents different aspects of that promise. And it is to these that I crave your attention in this sermon. The great words of my text are as true a gospel for us—and as much needed by us, God knows!—as they were for Jeremiah's contemporaries; and we can understand them better than either he or they did, because the days that were to come then have come now, and the King who was to reign in righteousness is reigning to-day, and His Name is Christ. My object now is, as simply as I can, to draw your attention to the two points in this text: a threefold view of our sad condition, and a twofold bright hope.

Now for the first of these. There is here—

I. A threefold view of the sad condition of humanity.

Observe the recurrence of the same idea in our text in different words: 'Their iniquity whereby they have sinned against Me.' . . . 'Their iniquity whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me.' You see there are three expressions which roughly may be taken as referring to the same ugly fact, but yet not meaning quite the same—'iniquity, or iniquities, sin, transgression.' These three all speak of the same sad element in your experience and mine, but they speak it from somewhat different points of view, and I wish to try to bring out that difference for you.

Suppose that three men were to describe a snake. One of them fixes his attention on its slimy coils, and describes its sinuous gliding movements. Another of them is fascinated by its wicked beauty, and talks about its livid markings and its glittering eye. The third thinks only of the swift-darting fangs, and of the poison-glands. They all three describe the snake, but they describe it from different points of view; and so it is here. 'Iniquity,' 'sin,' 'transgression' are synonyms to some extent, but they do not cover the same ground. They look at the serpent from different points of view.

First, a sinful life is a twisted or warped life. The word rendered 'iniquity,' in the Old Testament, in all probability literally means something that is not straight, but is bent, or, as I said, twisted or warped. That is a metaphor that runs through a great many languages. I suppose 'right' expresses a corresponding image, and means that which is straight and direct; and I suppose that 'wrong' has something to do with 'wrung'—that which has been forcibly diverted from a right line. We

all know the conventional colloquialism about a man being 'straight,' and such-and-such a thing being 'on the straight.' All sin is a twisting of the man from his proper course. Now there underlies that metaphor the notion that there is a certain line to which we are to conform. The schoolmaster draws a firm, straight line in the child's copybook; and then the little unaccustomed hand takes up on the second line its attempt, and makes tremulous, wavering pot-hooks and hangers. There is a copyhead for us, and our writing is, alas! all uneven and irregular, as well as blurred and blotted. There is a law, and you know it. You carry in yourself—I was going to say, the standard measure, and you can see whether when you put your life by the side of that, the two coincide. It is not for me to say; I know about my own, and you may know about yours, if you will be honest. The warped life belongs to us all.

The metaphor may suggest another illustration. A Czar of Russia was once asked what should be the course of the railway from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and he took up a ruler and drew a straight line upon the chart, and said, 'There; that is the course.' There is a straight road marked out for us all, going, like the old Roman roads, irrespective of physical difficulties in the contour of the country, climbing right over Alps if necessary, and plunging down into the deepest valleys, never deflecting one hairsbreadth, but going straight to its aim. And we—what are we? what are 'our crooked, wandering ways in which we live,' by the side of that straight path? This very prophet has a wonderful illustration, in which he compares the lives of men who have departed from God to the racing about in the wilderness of a wild dromedary, 'entangling her ways,' as he says, crossing

and recrossing, and getting into a maze of perplexity. Ah, my friend, is that not something like your life? Here is a straight road, and there are the devious footpaths that we have made, with many a detour, many a bend, many a coming back instead of going forward. 'The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.' All sin is deflection from the straight road, and we are all guilty of that.

Let me urge you to consult the standard that you carry within yourselves. If you never have done it before, do it now; or, better, when you are alone by yourselves. It is easy to imagine that a line is straight. But did you ever see the point of a needle under a microscope? However finely it is polished, and apparently tapering regularly, the scrutinising investigation of the microscope shows that it is all rough and irregular. What would a builder do if he had not a T-square and a level? His wall would be ever so far out, whilst he thought it perfectly perpendicular. And remember that a line at a very acute angle of deflection only needs to be carried out far enough to diverge so widely from the other line that you could put the whole solar system in between the two. The smallest departure from the line of right will end, unless it is checked, away out in the regions of darkness beyond. That is the lesson of the first of the words here.

The second of them, rendered in our version 'sin,' if I may recur to my former illustration, looks at the snake from a different point of view, and it declares that all sin misses the aim. The meaning of the word in the original is simply 'that which misses its mark.' And the meaning of the prevalent word in the New Testa-

ment for 'sin' means, in accordance with the ethical wisdom of the Greek, the same thing. Now, there are two ways in which that thought may be looked at. Every wrong thing that we do misses the aim, if you consider what a man's aim ought to be. We have grown a great deal wiser than the Puritans nowadays, and people make cheap reputations for advanced thought by depreciating their theology. We have not got beyond the first answer of the Shorter Catechism, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.' That is the only aim which corresponds to our constitution, to our circumstances. A palæontologist will pick up part of a skeleton embedded in the rocks, and from the study of a bone or two will tell you whether that creature was meant to swim, or to fly, or to walk; whether its element was sea, or sky, or land. Our destination for God is as plainly stamped on heart, mind, will, practical powers, as is the destination of such a creature deducible from its skeleton. 'Whose image and superscription hath it?' God's, stamped deep upon us all. And so, brother, whatever you win, unless you win God, you have missed the aim. Anything short of knowing Him and loving Him, serving Him, being filled and inspired by Him, is contrary to the destiny stamped upon us all. And if you have won God, then, whatever other human prizes you may have missed, you have made the best of life. Unless He is yours, and you are His, you have made a miss, and if I might venture to add, a mess, of yourself and of your life.

Then there is another side to this. The solemn teaching of this word is not confined to that thought, but also opens out into this other, that all godlessness, all the low, sinful lives that so many of us live, miss the shabby

aim which they set before themselves. I do not believe that any men or women ever got as much good, even of the lowest kind, out of a wrong thing as they expected to get when they ventured on it. If they did, they got something else along with it that took all the gilt off the gingerbread. Take the lowest kind of gross evil—sins of lust or of drunkenness. Well, no doubt the physical satisfaction desired is secured. Yes; and what about what comes after, in addition, that was not aimed at? The drunkard gets his pleasurable oblivion, his desired excitement. What about the corrugated liver, the palsied hand, the watery eye, the wrecked life, the broken hearts at home, and all the other accompaniments? There is an old Greek legend about a certain messenger that came to earth with a box, in which were all manner of pleasant gifts, and down at the bottom was a speckled pest that, when the box was emptied, crawled out into the sunshine and infected the land. That Pandora's box is like 'the good things' that sin brings to men. You gain, perhaps, your advantage, and you get something that spoils it all. Is not that your experience? I do not deny that you may satisfy your lower desires by a godless life. I know only too well how hard it is to get people to have higher tastes, and how all we ministers of religion are spending our efforts in order to win people to love something better than the world can give them. I also know that, if I could get to the very deepest recess of your hearts, you would admit that pleasures or advantages that are complete, that is to say, that satisfy you all round, and that are lasting, and that can front conscience and God who is at the back of conscience, are not to be won on the paths of sin and godlessness.

There is an old story that speaks of a knight and his company who were travelling through a desert, and suddenly beheld a castle into which they were invited and hospitably welcomed. A feast was spread before them, and each man ate and drank his fill. But as soon as they left the enchanted halls, they were as hungry as before they sat at the magic table. That is the kind of food that all our wrongdoing provides for us. 'He feedeth on ashes,' and hungers after he has fed. So, dear friends, learn this ancient wisdom, which is as true to-day as it ever was; and be sure of this, that there is only one course in this world which will give a man true, lasting satisfaction; that there is only one life, the life of obedience to and love of God, about which, at the end, there will not need to be said, 'This their way is their folly.'

And now, further, there is yet another word here, carrying with it important lessons. The expression which is translated in our text 'transgressed,' literally means 'rebelled.' And the lesson of it is, that all sin is, however little we think it, a rebellion against God. That introduces a yet graver thought than either of the former have brought us face to face with. Behind the law is the Lawgiver. When we do wrong, we not only blunder, we not only go aside from the right line, but also we lift up ourselves against our Sovereign King, and we say, 'Who is the Lord that we should serve Him? Our tongues are our own. Who is Lord over us? Let us break His bands asunder, and cast away His cords from us.' There are crimes against law; there are faults against one another. Sins are against God; and, dear friends, though you do not realise it, this is plain truth, that the essence, the common characteristic, of all

the acts which, as we have seen, are twisted and foolish, is that in them we are setting up another than the Lord our God to be our ruler. We are enthroning ourselves in His place. Do you not feel that that is true, and that in some small thing in which you go wrong, the essence of it is that you are seeking to please yourself, no matter what duty—which is only a heathen name for God—says to you?

Does not that thought make all these apparently trivial and insignificant deeds terribly important? Treason is treason, no matter what the act by which it is expressed. It may be a little thing to haul down a union-jack from a flagstaff, or to tear off a barn-door a proclamation with the royal arms at the top of it, but it may be rebellion. And if it is, it is as bad as to turn out a hundred thousand men in the field, with arms in their hands. There are small faults, there are trivial crimes; there are no small sins. An ounce of arsenic is arsenic, just as much as a ton; and it is a poison just as surely.

Now I have enlarged perhaps unduly on this earlier part of my subject, and can but briefly turn to the second division which I suggested, viz.:—

II. The twofold bright hope which shines through this darkness.

'I will cleanse . . . I will pardon.'

If sin combines in itself all these characteristics that I have touched upon, then clearly there is guilt, and clearly there are stains; and the gracious promise of this text deals with both the one and the other.

'I will pardon.' What is pardon? Do not limit it to the analogy of a criminal court. When the law of the land pardons, or rather when the administrator of the law pardons, that simply means that the penalty is sus-

pended. But is that forgiveness? Certainly it is only a part of it, even if it is a part. What do you fathers and mothers do when you forgive your child? You may use the rod or you may not, that is a question of what is best for the child. Forgiveness does not lie in letting him off the punishment; but forgiveness lies in the flowing to the child, uninterrupted, of the love of the parent heart, and that is God's forgiveness. Penalties, some of them, remain—thank God for it! 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions,' and the chastisement was part of the sign of the forgiveness. The great penalty of all, which is separation from God, is taken away; but the essence of that pardon, which it is my blessed work to proclaim to all men, is, that in spite of the prodigal's rags and the stench of the sty, the Father's love is round about him. It is round about you, brother.

Do you need pardon? Do you not? What does conscience say? What does the sense of remorse that sometimes blesses you, though it tortures, say? There are tendencies in this generation, as always, but very strong at present, to ignore the fact that all sin must necessarily lead to tremendous consequences of misery. It does so in this world, more or less. A man goes into another world as he left this one, and you and I believe that 'after death is the judgment.' Do you not require pardon? And how are you to get it? 'Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.' Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died that the loving forgiveness of God might find its way to every heart, and might take all men to its bosom, whilst yet the righteousness of God remained untarnished. I know not any gospel that goes deep enough to touch the real sore place in human na-

ture, except the gospel that says to you and me and all of us, 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.'

But forgiveness is not enough, for the worst results of past sin are the habits of sin which it leaves within us; so that we all need cleansing. Can we cleanse ourselves? Let experience answer. Did you ever try to cure yourself of some little trick of gesture, or manner, or speech? And did you not find out then how strong the trivial habit was? You never know the force of a current till you try to row against it. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin?' No; but God can change it for him. So, again, we say that Jesus Christ who died for 'the remission of sins that are past,' lives that He may give to each of us His own blessed life and power, and so draw us from our evil, and invest us in His good. Dear brother, I beseech you to look in the face the fact of your rebellion, of your missing your aim, of your perverted life, and to ask yourself the question, 'Can I deal either with the guilt of the past, or with the imperative tendency to repeated sin in the future?' You may have your leprous flesh made 'like the flesh of a little child.' You may have your stained robe washed and made lustrous 'white in the blood of the Lamb.' Pardon and cleansing are our two deepest needs. There is one hand from which we can receive them both, and one only. There is one condition on which we shall receive them, which is that we trust in Him, 'Who was crucified for our offences, and lives to hallow us into His own likeness.'

THE RECHABITES

'The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people have not hearkened unto Me.'—JER. xxxv. 16.

THE Rechabites had lived a nomad life, dwelling in tents, not practising agriculture, abstaining from intoxicants. They were therein obeying the command of their ancestor, Jonadab. They had been driven by the Babylonian invasion to take refuge in Jerusalem, and, no doubt, were a nine days' wonder there, with their strange ways. Jeremiah seized on their loyalty to their dead ancestor's command as an object-lesson, by which he put a still sharper edge on his rebukes. The Rechabites gave their ancestral law an obedience which shamed Judah's disobedience to Jehovah. God asks from us only what we are willing to give to one another, and God is often refused what men have but to ask and it is given. The virtues which we exercise to each other rebuke us, because we so often refuse to exercise them towards God.

I. Men's love to men condemns their lovelessness towards God.

These Rechabites witnessed to the power of loyal love to their ancestor. Think of the wealth of love which we have all poured out on husbands, wives, parents, children, and of the few drops that we have diverted to flow towards God. What a full flood fills the one channel; what a shrunken stream the other!

Think of the infinitely stronger reasons for loving God than for loving our dearest.

II. Men's faith in men condemns their distrust of God.

However you define faith, you find it abundantly exercised by us on the low plane of earthly relations. Is it belief in testimony? You men of business regulate your course by reports of markets on the other side of the world, and in a hundred ways extend your credence to common report, with but little, and often with no examination of the evidence. 'If we believe the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.' And how do we treat it? We are ready to accept and to act on men's testimony; we are slow to believe God's, and still slower to act on it, and to let it mould our lives.

Is faith the realising of the unseen? We exercise it in reference to the earthly unseen; we are slow to do so in reference to the heavenly things which are invisible.

Is faith the act of trust? Life is impossible without it. Not only is commerce a great system of credit, but no relations of life could last for a day without mutual confidence. We depend on one another, like a row of slightly built houses that help to hold each other up. These earthly exercises of trust should make it easier for us to rise to trusting God as much as we do each other. They ought to reveal to us the heavenly things. For indeed our human trust in one another should be a sample and shadow of our wise trust in the adequate Object of trust.

III. Men's obedience to human authority condemns their rebellion against God.

Jonadab's commandment evoked implicit obedience from his descendants for generations. Side by side in man's strange nature, with his self-will and love of independence, lies an equally strong tendency to obey and follow any masterful voice that speaks loudly and with an assumption of authority. The opinions of a clique,

the dogmas of a sect, the habits of a set, the sayings of a favourite author, the fashions of our class—all these rule men with a sway far more absolute than is exercised on them by the known will of God. The same man is a slave to usurped authority and a rebel against rightful and divine dominion.

Whether we consider the law of God in its claims or its contents, or its ultimate object, it is worthy of entire obedience. And what does it receive?

God asks from us only what we willingly give to men. Even the qualities and acts, such as love, trust, obedience, which as exercised towards men give dignity and beauty and strength, rise up in judgment to condemn us. There is a sense in which Augustine's often-denounced saying that they are 'splendid vices' is true, for they are turned in the wrong direction, and very often their being directed so completely towards men and women is the reason why they are not directed towards God, who alone deserves and alone can satisfy and reward them. Then they become sins and condemn us.

JEREMIAH'S ROLL BURNED AND REPRODUCED

'Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch . . . who wrote therein . . . all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire, and there were added besides unto them many like words.'—JER. xxxvi. 32.

THIS story brings us into the presence of the long death agony of the Jewish monarchy. The wretched Jehoiakim, the last king but two who reigned in Jerusalem, was put on the throne by the King of Egypt, as his tributary, and used by him as a buffer to bear the brunt of the Babylonian invasion. He seems to have had all the

vices of Eastern sovereigns. He was covetous, cruel, tyrannous, lawless, heartless, senseless. He was lavishing money on a grand palace, built with cedar and painted in vermilion, when the nation was in its death-throes. He had neither valour nor goodness, and so little did he understand the forces at work in his times that he held by the rotten support of Egypt against the grim power of Babylon, and of course, when the former was driven like chaff before the assault of the latter, he shared the fate of his principal, and Judæa was overrun by Babylon, Jerusalem captured, and the poor creature on the throne bound in chains to be carried to Babylon, but, as would appear, discovered by Nebuchadnezzar to be pliable enough to make it safe to leave him behind, as his vassal. His capture took place but a few months after the incident with which I am dealing now. It would appear probable that the confusion and alarm of the Babylonian assault on Egypt had led to a solemn fast in Jerusalem, at which the nation assembled. Jeremiah, who had been prophesying for some thirty years, and had already been in peril of his life from the godless tyrant on the throne, was led to collect, in one book, his scattered prophecies and read them in the ears of the people gathered for the fast. That reading had no effect at all on the people. The roll was then read to the princes, and in them roused fear and interested curiosity, and kindly desire for the safety of Jeremiah and Baruch, his amanuensis. It was next read to the king, and he cut the roll leaf by leaf and threw it on the brasier, not afraid, nor penitent, but enraged and eager to capture Jeremiah and Baruch. The burnt roll was reproduced by God's command, 'and there were added besides . . . many like words.'

I. The love of God necessarily prophesying evil.

As a matter of fact, the prophets of the Old Testament were all prophets of evil. They were watchmen seeing the sword and giving warning. No one ever spoke more plainly of the penalties of sin than did Christ. The authoritative revelation of the consequences of wrong-doing is an integral part of the gospel.

It is not the highest form of appeal. It would be higher to say, 'Do right because it is right; love Christ because Christ is lovely.' The purpose of such an appeal is to prepare us for the true gospel. But the appeal to a reasonable self-love, by warnings of the death which is the wages of sin, is perfectly legitimate. Dehortations from sin on the ground of its consequences is part of God's message.

Further, the warning comes from love. Punishment must needs follow on sin. Even His love must compel God to punish, and to warn before He does. Surely that is kind. His punishments are made known beforehand that we may be sure that caprice and anger have no part in inflicting them, but that they are the settled order of an inviolable law, and constitutional procedure of a just kind. Whether is it better to live under a despot who smites as he will, or under a constitutional king whose code is made public.

Surely it is needful to have clearly set forth the consequences of sin, in view of the sophistries buzzing round us all and nestling in our own hearts, of the deceitfulness of sin, of siren voices whispering, 'Ye shall not surely die.'

God's prophecies of evil are all conditional. They are sent on purpose that they may not be fulfilled.

II. The loving warnings disregarded and disliked.

Jehoiakim's behaviour is very human and like what we all do. We see the same thing repeated in all similar crises. Cassandra. Jewish prophets. Christ. English Commonwealth. French Revolution. Blindness to all signs and hostility to the men that warn.

We see it in the attitude to the gospel revelation. The Scripture doctrine of punishment always rouses antagonism, and in this day revolts men. There is much in present tendencies to weaken the idea of future retribution. Modern philanthropy makes it hard sometimes to administer even human laws. The feeling is good, but this exaggeration of it bad. It is a reaction to some extent against an unchristian way of preaching Christian truth, but even admitting that, it still remains true that an integral part of the Christian revelation is the revelation of death as the wages of sin.

We see the same recoil of feeling operating in individual cases. How many of you are quite indifferent to the preaching of a judgment to come, or only conscious of a movement of dislike! But how foolish this is! If a man builds a house on a volcano, is it not kind to tell him that the lava is creeping over the side? Is it not kind to wake, even violently, a traveller who has fallen asleep on the snow, before drowsiness stiffens into death?

III. The impotent rejection and attempted destruction of the message.

The roll is destroyed, but it is renewed. You do not alter facts by neglecting them, nor abrogate a divine decree by disbelieving it. The awful law goes on its course. It is not pre-eminent seamanship to put the look-out man in irons because he sings out, 'Breakers ahead.' The crew do not abolish the reef *so*, but they

end their last chance of avoiding it, and presently the shock comes, and the cruel coral tears through the hull.

IV. The neglected message made harder and heavier.

Every rejection makes a man more obdurate. Every rejection increases criminality, and therefore increases punishment. Every rejection brings the punishment nearer.

The increased severity of the message comes from love.

Oh, think of the infinite 'treasures of darkness' which God has in reserve, and let the words of warning lead you to Jesus, that you may only hear and never experience the judgments of which they warn. Give Christ the roll of judgment and He will destroy it, nailing it to His cross, and instead of it will give you a book full of blessing.

ZEDEKIAH

'Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned as king . . . whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king.'—JER. xxxvii. 1.

ZEDEKIAH was a small man on a great stage, a weakling set to face circumstances that would have taxed the strongest. He was a youth at his accession to the throne of a distracted kingdom, and if he had had any political insight he would have seen that his only chance was to adhere firmly to Babylon, and to repress the foolish aristocracy who hankered after alliance with the rival power of Egypt. He was mad enough to form an alliance with the latter, which was constructive rebellion against the former, and was strongly reprobated by Jeremiah. Swift vengeance followed; the country was ravaged,

Zedekiah in his fright implored Jeremiah's prayers and made faint efforts to follow his counsels. The pressure of invasion was lifted, and immediately he forgot his terrors and forsook the prophet. The Babylonian army was back next year, and the final investment of Jerusalem began. The siege lasted sixteen months, and during it, Zedekiah miserably vacillated between listening to the prophet's counsels of surrender and the truculent nobles' advice to resist to the last gasp. The miseries of the siege live for ever in the Book of Lamentations. Mothers boiled their children, nobles hunted on dunghills for food. Their delicate complexions were burned black, and famine turned them into living skeletons. Then, on a long summer day in July came the end. The king tried to skulk out by a covered way between the walls, his few attendants deserted him in his flight, he was caught at last down by the fords of the Jordan, carried prisoner to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah away up in the north beyond Baalbec, and there saw his sons slain before his eyes, and, as soon as he had seen that last sight, was blinded, fettered, and carried off to Babylon, where he died. His career teaches us lessons which I may now seek to bring out.

I. A weak character is sure to become a wicked one.

Moral weakness and inability to resist strong pressure was the keynote of Zedekiah's character. There were good things in him; he had kindly impulses, as was shown in his emancipation of the slaves at a crisis of Jerusalem's fate. Left to himself, he would at least have treated Jeremiah kindly, and did rescue him from lingering death in the foul dungeon to which the ruffian nobility had consigned him, and he provided for his being at least saved from dying of starvation during the siege.

He listened to him secretly, and would have accepted his counsel if he had dared. But he yielded to the stronger wills of the nobles, though he sometimes bitterly resented their domination, and complained that 'the king is not he that can do anything against you.'

Like most weak men, he found that temptations to do wrong abounded more than visible inducements to do right, and he was afraid to do right, and fancied that he was compelled by the force of circumstances to do wrong. So he drifted and drifted, and at last was smashed to fragments on the rocks, as all men are who do not keep a strong hand on the helm and a steady eye on the compass. The winds are good servants but bad masters. If we do not coerce circumstances to carry us on the course which conscience has pricked out on the chart, they will wreck us.

II. A man may have a good deal of religion and yet not enough to mould his life.

Zedekiah listened to the prophet by fits and starts. He was eager to have the benefit of the prophet's prayers. He liberated the slaves in Jerusalem. He came secretly to Jeremiah more than once to know if there were any message from God for him. Yet he had not faith enough nor submission enough to let the known will of God rule his conduct, whatever the nobles might say.

Are there not many of us who have a belief in God and a general acquiescence in Christ's precepts, who order our lives now and then by these, and yet have not come up to the point of full and final surrender? Alas, alas, for the multitudes who are 'not far from the kingdom,' but who never come near enough to be actually *in* it! To be not far from *is* to be out of, and to be out

of is to be, like Zedekiah, blinded and captived and dead in prison at last.

III. God's love is wonderfully patient.

Jeremiah was to Zedekiah the incarnation of God's unwearied pleadings. During his whole reign, the prophet's voice sounded in his ears, through all the clamours and cries of factions, and mingled at last with the shouts of the besiegers and the groans of the wounded, like the sustained note of some great organ, persisting through a babel of discordant noises. It was met with indifference, and it sounded on. It provoked angry antagonism and still it spoke. Violence was used to stifle it in vain. And it was not only Jeremiah's courageous pertinacity that spoke through that persistent voice, but God's unwearied love, which being rejected is not driven away, being neglected becomes more beseeching, 'is not easily provoked' to cease its efforts, but 'beareth all' despite, and hopeth for softened hearts till the last moment before doom falls.

That patient love pleads with each of us as persistently as Jeremiah did with Zedekiah.

IV. The long-delayed judgment falls at last.

With infinite reluctance the divine love had to do what God Himself has called 'His strange work.' Divine Justice travels slowly, but arrives at last. Her foot is 'leaden' both in regard to its tardiness and its weight. There is no ground in the long postponement of retribution for the fond dream that it will never come, though men lull themselves to sleep with that lie. 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is throughly set in them to do evil.' But the sentence will be executed. The pleading love, which has for many returning au-

tumns spared the barren tree and sought to make it fit to bear fruit, does not prevent the owner saying at last to his servant with the axe in his hand, 'Now! thou shalt cut it down.'

THE WORLD'S WAGES TO A PROPHET

'And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's arm, 12. Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. 13. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. 14. Then said Jeremiah, It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. 15. Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. 16. When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; 17. Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. 18. Moreover, Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? 19. Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? 20. Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. 21. Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.'—JER. xxxvii. 11–21.

SOME sixteen years had passed since Jehoiakim had burned the roll, during all of which the slow gathering of the storm, which was to break over the devoted city, had been going on, and Jeremiah had been vainly calling on the people to return to Jehovah. The last agony was now not far off. But there came a momentary pause in the siege, produced by the necessity of an advance against a relieving army from Egypt, which created fallacious hopes in the doomed city. It was only a pause. Back came the investing force, and again the

terrible, lingering process of starving into surrender was resumed. Our text begins with the raising of the siege, and extends to some point after its resumption. It needs little elucidation, so clearly is the story told, and so natural are the incidents; but perhaps we shall best gather its instruction if we look at the three sets of actors separately, and note the hostile authorities, the patient prophet and prisoner, and the feeble king. The play of these strongly contrasted characters is full of vividness and instruction.

I. We have that rough 'captain of the ward,' who laid hands on the prophet at the gate on the north side of the city, leading to the road to the territory of Benjamin. No doubt there was a considerable exodus from Jerusalem when the Assyrian lines were deserted, and common prudence would have facilitated it, as reducing the number of mouths to be fed, in case the siege were renewed; but malice is not prudent, and, instead of letting the hated Jeremiah slip quietly away home to Anathoth, and so getting rid of his prophecies and him, Irijah ('the Lord is a beholder') arrested him on a charge of meditating desertion to the enemy. It was a colourable accusation, for Jeremiah's constant exhortation had been to 'go out to the Chaldeans,' and so secure life and mild treatment. But it was clearly false, for the Chaldeans were for the moment gone, and the time was the very worst that could have been chosen for a contemplated flight to their camp.

The real reason for the prophet's wish to leave the city was only too simple. It was to see if he could get 'a portion'—some of his property, or perhaps rather some little store of food—to take back to the famine-scourged city, which, he knew, would soon be again at

starvation-point. There appears to have been a little company of fellow-villagers with him, for 'in the midst of the people' (v. 12) is to be construed with 'to go into the land of Benjamin.' The others seem to have been let pass, and only Jeremiah detained, which makes the charge more evidently a trumped-up excuse for laying hands on him. Jeremiah calls it in plain words what it was—'a lie'—and protests his innocence of any such design. But the officious Irijah knew too well how much of a feather in his cap his getting hold of the prophet would be, to heed his denials, and dragged him off to the princes.

Sixteen years ago 'the princes' round Jehoiakim had been the prophet's friends; but either a new generation had come with a new king, or else the tempers of the men had changed with the growing misery. Their behaviour was more lawless than the soldiers' had been. They did not even pretend to examine the prisoner, but blazed up at once in anger. They had him in their power now, and did their worst, lawlessly scourging him first, and then thrusting him into 'the house of the pit'—some dark, underground hole, below the house of an official, where there were a number of 'cells'—filthy and stifling, no doubt; and there they left him. What for?

The charge of intended desertion was a mere excuse for wreaking their malice on him. They hated Jeremiah because he had steadily opposed the popular determination to fight, and had foretold disaster. Add to this that he had held up a high standard of religion and morality to a corrupt and idolatrous people, and his 'unpopularity' is sufficiently explained.

Would that the same causes did not produce the same effects now! Individuals still think an honest rebuke of their faults an insult, and a plain statement of their

danger a sign of ill-feeling. Try to warn a drunkard or a profligate by telling him of the disease and misery which will dog his sins, or by setting plainly before him God's law of purity and sobriety, and you will find that the prophet's function still brings with it, in many cases, the prophet's doom. But still more truly is this the case with masses, whether nations or cities. A spurious patriotism resents as unpatriotic the far truer love of country which sets a trumpet to its mouth to tell the people their sins. In all democratic communities, whether republican or regal in their form of government, a crying evil is flattery of the masses, exalting their virtues and foretelling their prosperity, while hiding their faults and slurring over the requirements of morality and religion, which are the foundations of prosperity. What did England do with her prophets? What did America do with hers? What wages do they get to-day? The men who dare to tell their countrymen their faults, and to preach temperance, peace, civic purity, personal morality, are laid hold of by the Irijahs who preside over the newspapers, and are pilloried as deserters and half traitors at heart.

II. We see the patient, unmoved prophet. One flash of honest indignation repels the charge of deserting, and then he is silent. 'As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.' It is useless to plead before lawless violence. A silent martyr eloquently condemns an unjust judge. So, without opposition or apparent remonstrance, Jeremiah is cast into the foul den where he lies for 'many days,' patiently bearing his fate, and speaking his complaint to God only. How long his imprisonment lasted does not appear; but the context implies that during it the siege was resumed,

and that there was difficulty in procuring bread. Then the king sent for him secretly.

Zedekiah's temper at the time will be considered presently. Here we have to do with Jeremiah's answer to his question. In it we may note, as equally prominent and beautifully blended, respect, submission, consciousness of peril and impending death, and unshaken boldness. He knew that his life was at the disposal of the capricious, feeble Zedekiah. He bows before him as his subject, and brings his 'supplication'; but not one jot of his message will he abate, nor smooth down its terribleness an atom. He repeats as unfalteringly as ever the assurance that the king of Babylon will take the city. He asserts his own innocence as regards king and courtiers and people; and he asks the scornful question what has become of all the smooth-tongued prophets of prosperity, as if he were bidding the king look over the city wall and see the tokens of their lies and of Jeremiah's truth in the investing lines of the all but victorious enemy.

Such a combination of perfect meekness and perfect courage, unstained loyalty to his king, and supreme obedience to his God, was only possible to a man who lived in very close communion with Jehovah, and had learned thereby to fear none less, because he feared Him so well, and to reverence all else whom He had set in places of reverence. True courage, of the pattern which befits God's servants, is ever gentle. Bluster is the sign of weakness. A Christian hero—and no man will be a Christian as he ought to be, who has not something of the hero in him—should win by meekness. Does not the King of all such ride prosperously 'because of truth and meekness,' and must not the armies which follow Him do the same? Faithful witnessing to men of their sins

need not be rude, harsh, or self-asserting. But we must live much in fellowship with the Lord of all the meek and the pattern of all patient sufferers and faithful witnesses, if we are ever to be like Him, or even like His pale shadow as seen in this meek prophet. The fountains of strength and of patience spring side by side at the foot of the cross.

III. We have the weak Zedekiah, with his pitiable vacillation. He had been Nebuchadnezzar's nominee, and had served him for some years, and then rebelled. His whole career indicates a feeble nature, taking the impression of anything which was strongly laid on it. He was a king of putty, when the times demanded one of iron. He was cowed by the 'princes.' Sometimes he was afraid to disobey Jeremiah, and then afraid to let his masters know that he was so. Thus he sends for the prophet stealthily, and his first question opens a depth of conflict in his soul. He did believe that the prophet spoke the word of Jehovah, and yet he could not muster up courage to follow his convictions and go against the princes and the mob. He wanted another 'word' from Jehovah, by which he meant a word of another sort than the former. He could not bring his mind to obey the word which he had, and so he weakly hoped that perhaps God's word might be changed into one that he would be willing to obey. Many men are, like him, asking, 'Is there any word from the Lord?' and meaning, 'Is there any change in the condition of receiving His favour?'

He had interest enough in the prophet to interfere for his comfort, and to have him put into better quarters in the palace and provided with a 'circle' (a round loaf) of bread out of Baker Street, as long as there was any

in the city—not a very long time. But why did he do so much, and not do more? He knew that Jeremiah was innocent, and that his word was God's; and what he should have done was to have shaken off his masterful 'servants,' followed his conscience, and obeyed God. Why did he not? Because he was a coward, infirm of purpose, and therefore 'unstable as water.'

He is another of the tragic examples, with which all life as well as scripture is studded, of how much evil is possible to a weak character. In this world, where there are so many temptations to be bad, no man will be good who cannot strongly say 'No.' The virtue of strength of will may be but like the rough fence round young trees to keep cattle from browsing on them and east winds from blighting them. But the fence is needed, if the trees are to grow. 'To be weak is to be miserable,' and sinful too, generally. 'Whom resist' must be the motto for all noble, God-like, and God-pleasing life.

THE LAST AGONY

'In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. 2. And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up. 3. And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarse-chim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. 4. And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain. 5. But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him. 6. Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. 7. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. 8. And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem. 9. Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that

remained. 10. But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.'—JER. xxxix. 1–10.

Two characteristics of this account of the fall of Jerusalem are striking,—its minute particularity, giving step by step the details of the tragedy, and its entire suppression of emotion. The passionless record tells the tale without a tear or a sob. For these we must go to the Book of Lamentations. This is the history of God's judgment, and here emotion would be misplaced. But there is a world of repressed feeling in the long-drawn narrative, as well as in the fact that three versions of the story are given here (chap. lii., 2 Kings xxv.). Sorrow curbed by submission, and steadily gazing on God's judicial act, is the temper of the narrative. It should be the temper of all sufferers. 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.' But we may note the three stages in the final agony which this section distinguishes.

I. There is the entrance of the enemy. Jerusalem fell not by assault, but by famine. The siege lasted eighteen months, and ended when 'all the bread in the city was spent.' The pitiful pictures in Lamentations fill in the details of misery, telling how high-born women picked garbage from dung-heaps, and mothers made a ghastly meal of their infants, while the nobles were wasted to skeletons, and the little children piteously cried for bread. At length a breach was made in the northern wall (as Josephus tells us, 'at midnight'), and through it, on the ninth day of the fourth month (corresponding to July), swarmed the conquerors, unresisted. The commanders of the Babylonians planted themselves at 'the middle gate,' probably a gate in the wall between the upper and lower city, so securing for them the control of both.

How many of these fierce soldiers are named in verse 3? At first sight there seem to be six, but that number must be reduced by at least two, for Rab-saris and Rab-mag are official titles, and designate the offices (chief eunuch and chief magician) of the two persons whose names they respectively follow. Possibly Samgar-Nebo is also to be deducted, for it has been suggested that, as that name stands, it is anomalous, and it has been proposed to render its first element, *Samgar*, as meaning *cup-bearer*, and being the official title attached to the name preceding it; while its second part, *Nebo*, is regarded as the first element in a new name obtained by reading *shashban* instead of Sarsechim, and attaching that reading to Nebo. This change would bring verse 3 into accord with verse 13, for in both places we should then have Nebo-shashban designated as chief of the eunuchs. However the number of the commanders is settled, and whatever their names, the point which the historian emphasises is their presence there. Had it come to this, that men whose very names were invocations of false gods (' Nergal protect the king,' ' Nebo delivers me ' if we read ' Nebo-shashban,' or ' Be gracious, Nebo,' if Samgar-nebo) should sit close by the temple, and have their talons fixed in the Holy City?

These intruders were all unconscious of the meaning of their victory, and the tragedy of their presence there. They thought that they were Nebuchadnezzar's servants, and had captured for him, at last, an obstinate little city, which had given more trouble than it was worth. Its conquest was but a drop in the bucket of his victories. How little they knew that they were serving that Jehovah whom they thought that Nebo had conquered in their persons! How little they knew that they

were the instruments of the most solemn act of judgment in the world's history till then!

The causes which led to the fall of Jerusalem could be reasonably set forth as purely political without a single reference to Israel's sins or God's judgment; but none the less was its capture the divine punishment of its departure from Him, and none the less were Nergal-sharezer and his fellows God's tools, the axes with which He hewed down the barren tree. So does He work still, in national and individual history. You may, in a fashion, account for both without bringing Him in at all; but your philosophy of either will be partial, unless you recognise that 'the history of the world is the judgment of the world.' It was the same hand which set these harsh conquerors at the middle gate of Jerusalem that sent the German armies to encamp in the Place de la Concorde in Paris; and in neither case does the recognition of God in the crash of a falling throne absolve the victors from the responsibility of their deeds.

II. We have the flight and fate of Zedekiah and his evil advisers (vs. 4–7). His weakness of character shows itself to the end. Why was there no resistance? It would have better beseemed him to have died on his palace threshold than to have skulked away in the dark between the shelter of the 'two walls.' But he was a poor weakling, and the curse of God sat heavy on his soul, though he had tried to put it away. Conscience made a coward of him; for he, at all events, knew who had set the strangers by the middle gate. Men who harden heart and conscience against threatened judgments are very apt to collapse, when the threats are fulfilled. The frost breaks up with a rapid thaw.

Ezekiel (Ezek. xii. 12) prophesied the very details of

the flight. It was to be 'in the dark,' the king himself was to 'carry' some of his valuables, they were to 'dig through' the earthen ramparts; and all appears to have been literally fulfilled. The flight was taken in the opposite direction from the entrance of the besiegers; two walls, which probably ran down the valley between Zion and the temple mount, afforded cover to the fugitives as far as to the south city wall, and there some postern let them out to the king's garden. That is a tragic touch. It was no time then to gather flowers. The forlorn and frightened company seems to have scattered when once outside the city; for there is a marked contrast in verse 4 between 'they fled' and 'he went.' In the description of his flight Zedekiah is still called, as in verses 1 and 2, the king; but after his capture he is only 'Zedekiah.'

Down the rocky valley of the Kedron he hurried, and had a long enough start of his pursuers to get to Jericho. Another hour would have seen him safe across Jordan, but the prospect of escape was only dangled before his eyes to make capture more bitter. Probably he was too much absorbed with his misery and fear to feel any additional humiliation from the mighty memories of the scene of his capture; but how solemnly fitting it was that the place which had seen Israel's first triumph, when 'by faith the walls of Jericho fell down,' should witness the lowest shame of the king who had cast away his kingdom by unbelief! The conquering dead might have gathered in shadowy shapes to reproach the weakling and sluggard who had sinned away the heritage which they had won. The scene of the capture underscores the lesson of the capture itself; namely, the victorious power of faith, and the defeat and shame which,

in the long-run, are the fruits of an 'evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God.'

That would be a sad march through all the length of the fair land that had slipped from his slack fingers, up to far-off Riblah, in the great valley between the Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon. Observe how, in verses 5 and 6, the king of Babylon has his royal title, and Zedekiah has not. The crown has fallen from his head, and there is no more a king in Judah. He who had been king now stands chained before the cruel conqueror. Well might the victor think that Nebo had overcome Jehovah, but better did the vanquished know that Jehovah had kept his word.

Cruelty and expediency dictated the savage massacre and mutilation which followed. The death of Zedekiah's sons, and of the nobles who had scoffed at Jeremiah's warnings, and the blinding of Zedekiah, were all measures of precaution as well as of savagery. They diminished the danger of revolt; and a blind, childless prisoner, without counsellors or friends, was harmless. But to make the sight of his slaughtered sons the poor wretch's last sight, was a refinement of gratuitous delight in torturing. Thus singularly was Ezekiel's enigma solved and harmonised with its apparent contradictions in Jeremiah's prophecies: 'Yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there' (Ezek. xii. 13).

Zedekiah is one more instance of the evil which may come from a weak character, and of the evil which may fall on it. He had good impulses, but he could not hold his own against the bad men round him, and so he stumbled on, not without misgivings, which only needed to be attended to with resolute determination, in order to have reversed his conduct and fate. Feeble hands can

pull down venerable structures built in happier times. It takes a David and a Solomon to rear a temple, but a Zedekiah can overthrow it.

III. We have the completion of the conquest (vs. 8–10). The first care of the victors was, of course, to secure themselves, and fires and crowbars were the readiest way to that end. But the wail in the last chapter of Lamentations hints at the usual atrocities of the sack of a city, when brutal lust and as brutal ferocity are let loose. Chapter lii. shows that the final step in our narrative was separated from the capture of the city by a month, which was, no doubt, a month of nameless agonies, horrors, and shame. Then the last drop was added to the bitter cup, in the deportation of the bulk of the inhabitants, according to the politic custom of these old military monarchies. What rending of ties, what weariness and years of long-drawn-out yearning, that meant, can easily be imagined. The residue left behind to keep the country from relapsing into waste land was too weak to be dangerous, and too cowed to dare anything. One knows not who had the sadder lot, the exiles, or the handful of peasants left to till the fields that had once been their own, and to lament their brethren gone captives to the far-off land.

Surely the fall of Jerusalem, though all the agony is calmed ages ago, still remains as a solemn beacon-warning that the wages of sin is death, both for nations and individuals; that the threatenings of God's Word are not idle, but will be accomplished to the utmost tittle; and that His patience stretches from generation to generation, and His judgments tarry because He is not willing that any should perish, but that for all the long-suffering there comes a time when even divine love sees

that it is needful to say 'Now!' and the bolt falls. The solemn word addressed to Israel has application as real to all Christian churches and individual souls: 'You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.'

EBEDMELECH THE ETHIOPIAN

'For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.'—JER. xxxix. 18.

EBEDMELECH is a singular anticipation of that other Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip met on the desert road to Gaza. It is prophetic that on the eve of the fall of the nation, a heathen man should be entering into union with God. It is a picture in little of the rejection of Israel and the ingathering of the Gentiles.

I. The identity in all ages of the bond that unites men to God.

It is a common notion that faith is peculiar to the New Testament. But the Old Testament 'trust' is identical with the New Testament 'faith,' and it is a great pity that the variation in translation has obscured that identity. The fact of the prominence given to law in the Old Testament does not affect this. For every effort to keep the law must have led to consciousness of imperfection, and that consciousness must have driven to the exercise of penitent trust. The difference of degrees of revelation does not affect it, for faith is the same, however various the contents of the creed.

Note further the personal object of Faith—'in ME.' The object of Faith is not a proposition but a Person. That Person is the same in the Old Testament and in the New. The Jehovah of the one is the God in Christ of the other.

Consequently faith must be more than intellectual assent, it must be voluntary and emotional, the act of the whole man, 'the synthesis of the reason and the will.'

II. The contrast of a formal and real union with God.

The king, prophets, priests, the whole nation, had an outward connection with Him, but it meant nothing. And this foreigner, a slave, perhaps not even a proselyte, a eunuch, had what the children of the covenant had not, a true union with God through Faith.

Judaism was not an exclusive system, but was intended to bring in the nations to share in its blessings. Outward descent gave outward place within the covenant, but the distinction of real and formal place there was established from the beginning. What else than this is the meaning of all the threatenings of Deuteronomy? What else did Isaiah mean when he called the rulers in Jerusalem 'Rulers of Sodom'? Here the fates of Ebedmelech and of Zedekiah illustrate both sides of the truth. The danger of trusting in outward possession and of thinking that God's mercy is our property besets all Churches. Organisations of Christianity are necessary, but it is impossible to tell the harm that formal connection with them has done. There is only one bond that unites men to God—personal trust in Him as 'in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.'

III. The possibility of exercising uniting faith even in most unfavourable circumstances.

This Ebedmelech had everything against him. The contemptuous exclusion of him from any share in the covenant might well have discouraged him. The poorest Jew treated him as a heathen dog, who had no right even to crumbs from the table spread for the children only. He was plunged into a sea of godlessness, and

saw examples enough of utter carelessness as to Jehovah in His professed servants to drive him away from a religion which had so little hold on its professed adherents. The times were gloomy, and the Jehovah whom Judah professed to worship seemed to have small power to help His worshippers. It would have been no wonder if the conduct of the people of Jerusalem had caused the name of Jehovah to be blasphemed by this Gentile, nor if he had revolted from a religion that was alleged to be the special property of one race, and that such a race! But he listened to the cry of his own heart, and to the words of God's prophet, and his faith pierced through all obstacles—like the roots of some tree feeling for the water. He found the vitalising fountain that he sought, and His name stands to all ages as a witness that no seeking heart, that longs for God, is ever balked in its search, and that a faith, very imperfect as to its knowledge, may be so strong as to its substance that it unites him who exercises it with God, while the possessors of ecclesiastical privileges and of untarnished and full-orbed orthodox knowledge have no fellowship with Him.

IV. The safety given by such uniting faith.

To Ebedmelech, escape from death by the besiegers' swords was promised. To us a more blessed safety and exemption from a worse destruction are assured. 'The life which is life indeed' may be ours, and shall assuredly be ours, if our trust knits us to Him who is the Life, and who has said 'He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'

GOD'S PATIENT PLEADINGS

'I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.'—JER. xliv. 4.

THE long death-agony of the Jewish kingdom has come to an end. The frivolous levity, which fed itself on illusions and would not be sobered by facts, has been finally crushed out of the wretched people. The dreary succession of incompetent kings—now a puppet set up by Egypt, now another puppet set up by Babylon, has ended with the weak Zedekiah. The throne of David is empty, and the long line of kings, which numbered many a strong, wise, holy man, has dwindled into a couple of captives, one of them blind and both of them paupers on an idolatrous monarch's bounty. The country is desolate, the bulk of the people exiles, and the poor handful, who had been left by the conqueror, flitting like ghosts, or clinging, like domestic animals, to their burnt homes and wasted plains, have been quarrelling and fighting among themselves, murdering the Jewish ruler whom Babylon had left them, and then in abject terror have fled *en masse* across the border into Egpyt, where they are living wretched lives. What a history that people had gone through since they had lived on the same soil before! From Moses to Zedekiah, what a story! From Goshen till now it had been one long tragedy which seems to have at last reached its fifth act. Nine hundred years have passed, and this is the issue of them all!

The circumstances might well stir the heart of the prophet, whose doleful task it had been to foretell the coming of the storm, who had had to strip off Judah's delusions and to proclaim its certain fall, and who in do-

ing so had carried his life in his hand for forty years, and had never met with recognition or belief.

Jeremiah had been carried off by the fugitives to Egypt, and there he made a final effort to win them back to God. He passed before them the outline of the whole history of the nation, treating it as having accomplished one stadium—and what does he find? In all these days since Goshen there has been one monotonous story of vain divine pleadings and human indifference, God beseeching and Israel turning away—and now at last the crash, long foretold, never credited, which had been drawing nearer through all the centuries, has come, and Israel is scattered among the people.

Such are the thoughts and emotions that speak in the exquisitely tender words of our text. It suggests—

I. God's antagonism to sin.

II. The great purpose of all His pleadings.

III. God's tender and unwearied efforts.

IV. The obstinate resistance to His tender pleadings.

I. God's antagonism to sin.

It is the one thing in the universe to which He is opposed. Sin is essentially antagonism to God. People shrink from the thought of God's hatred of sin, because of—

An under-estimate of its gravity. Contrast the human views of its enormity, as shown by men's playing with it, calling it by half-jocose names and the like, with God's thought of its heinousness.

A false dread of seeming to attribute human emotions to God. But there is in God what corresponds to our human feelings, something analogous to the attitude of a pure human mind recoiling from evil.

The divine love must necessarily be pure, and the mightier its energy of forth-going, the mightier its energy of recoil. God's 'hate' is Love inverted and *re*verted on itself. A divine love which had in it no necessity of hating evil would be profoundly immoral, and would be called devilish more fitly than divine.

II. The great purpose of the divine pleadings.

To wean from sin is the main end of prophecy. It is the main end of all revelation. God must chiefly desire to make His creatures like Himself. Sin makes a special revelation necessary. Sin determines the form of it.

III. God's tender and unwearied efforts.

'Rising early' is a strong metaphor to express persistent effort. The more obstinate is our indifference, the more urgent are His calls. He raises His voice as our deafness grows. Mark, too, the tenderness of the entreaty in this text, 'Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!' His hatred of it is adduced as a reason which should touch any heart that loves Him. He beseeches as if He, too, were saying, 'Though I might be bold to enjoin thee' that which is fitting, 'yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee.' The manifestation of His disapproval and the appeal to our love by the disclosure of His own are the most powerful, winning and compelling dehortations from sin. Not by brandishing the whip, not by a stern law written on tables of stone, but by unveiling His heart, does God win us from our sins.

IV. The obstinate resistance to God's tender pleadings.

The tragedy of the nation is summed up in one word, 'They hearkened not.'

That power of neglecting God's voice and opposing God's will is the mystery of our nature. How strange it is that a human will should be able to lift itself in op-

position to the Sovereign Will! But stranger and more mysterious and tragic still is it that we should choose to exercise that power and find pleasure, and fancy that we shall ever find advantage, in refusing to listen to His entreaties and choosing to flout His uttered will.

Such opposition was Israel's ruin. It will be ours if we persist in it. 'If God spared not the natural branches, neither will He spare thee.'

THE SWORD OF THE LORD

'O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. 7. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge?'—JER. xlvii. 6, 7.

THE prophet is here in the full tide of his prophecies against the nations round about. This paragraph is entirely occupied with threatenings. Bearing the cup of woes, he turns to one after another of the ancestral enemies of Israel, Egypt and Philistia on the south and west, Moab on the south and east, then northwards to Ammon, south to Edom, north to Damascus, Kedar, Hagor, Elam, and finally to the great foe—Babylon. In the hour of Israel's lowest fortunes and the foe's proudest exultation these predictions are poured out. Jeremiah stands as if wielding the sword of which our text speaks, and whirls and points the flashing terror of its sharpened edge against the ring of foes. It turns every way, like the weapon of the angelic guard before the lost paradise, and wherever it turns a kingdom falls.

In the midst of his stern denunciations he checks himself to utter this plaintive cry of pity and longing. A tender gleam of compassion breaks through the heart of

the thunder-cloud. It is very beautiful to note that the point at which the irrepressible welling up of sweet waters breaks the current of his prophecy is the prediction against Israel's bitterest, because nearest, foe, 'these uncircumcised Philistines.' He beholds the sea of wrath drowning the great Philistine plain, its rich harvests trampled under foot by 'stamping of hoofs of his strong ones,' and that desolation wrings from his heart the words of our text. I take them to be spoken by the prophet. That, of course, is doubtful. It may be that they are meant to give in a vivid dramatic form the effect of the judgments on the sufferers. They recognise these as 'the sword of the Lord.' Their only thought is an impatient longing that the judgments would cease,—no confession of sin, no humbling of themselves, but only—'remove Thy hand from us.'

And the answer is either the prophet's or the divine voice; spoken in the one case to himself, in the other to the Philistines; but in either setting forth the impossibility that the sweeping sword should rest, since it is the instrument in God's hand, executing His charge and fulfilling His appointment.

I. The shrinking from the unsheathed sword of the Lord.

We may deal with the words as representing very various states of mind.

They may express the impatience of sufferers. Afflictions are too often wasted. Whatever the purpose of chastisement, the true lesson of it is so seldom learned, even in regard to the lowest wisdom it is adapted to teach. In an epidemic, how few people learn to take precautions, such as cleanliness or attention to diet! In hard times commercially, how slow most are to learn

the warning against luxury, over-trading, haste to be rich! And in regard to higher lessons, men have a dim sense sometimes that the blow comes from God, but, like Balaam, go on their way in spite of the angel with the sword. It does not soften, nor restrain, nor drive to God. The main result is, impatient longing for its removal.

The text may express the rooted dislike to the thought and the fact of punishment as an element in divine government. This is a common phase of feeling always, and especially so now. There is a present tendency, good in many aspects, but excessive, to soften away the thought of punishment; or to suppose that God's punishments must have the same purposes as men's. We cannot punish by way of retribution, for no balance of ours is fine enough to weigh motives or to determine criminality. Our punishments can only be deterrent or reformatory, but this is by reason of our weakness. He has other objects in view.

Current ideas of the love of God distort it by pitting it against His retributive righteousness. Current ideas of sin diminish its gravity by tracing it to heredity or environment, or viewing it as a necessary stage in progress. The sense of God's judicial action is paralysed and all but dead in multitudes.

All these things taken together set up a strong current of opinion against any teaching of punitive energy in God.

The text may express the pitying reluctance of the prophet.

Jeremiah is remarkable for the weight with which 'the burden of the Lord' pressed upon him. The true prophet feels the pang of the woes which he is charged to announce more than his hearers do.

Unfair charges are made against gospel preachers, as if they delighted in the thought of the retribution which they have to proclaim.

II. The solemn necessity for the unsheathing of the sword.

The judgments must go on. In the text the all-sufficient reason given is that God has willed it so. But we must take into account all that lies in that name of 'Lord' before we understand the message, which brought patience to the heart of the prophet. If a Jewish prophet believed anything, he believed that the will of the Lord was absolutely good. Jeremiah's reason for the flashing sword is no mere beating down human instincts, by alleging a will which is sovereign, and there an end. We have to take into account the whole character of Him who has willed it, and then we can discern it to be inevitable that God should punish evil.

His character makes it inevitable. God's righteousness cannot but hate sin and fight against it. To leave it unpunished stains His glory.

God's love cannot but draw and wield the sword. It is unsheathed in the interests of all that is 'lovely and of good report.' If God is God at all, and not an almighty devil, He must hate sin. The love and the righteousness, which in deepest analysis are one, must needs issue in punishment. There would be a blight over the universe if they did not.

The very order of the universe makes it inevitable. All things, as coming from Him, must work for His lovers and against His enemies, as 'the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.'

The constitution of men makes it inevitable. Sin brings its own punishment, in gnawing conscience, de-

filed memories, incapacity for good, and many other penalties.

It is to be remembered that the text originally referred to retribution on nations for national sins, and that what Jeremiah regarded as the strokes of the Lord might be otherwise regarded as political catastrophes. Let us not overlook that application of the principles of the text. Scripture regards the so-called 'natural consequences' of a nation's sins as God's judgments on them. The Christian view of the government of the world looks on all human affairs as moved by God, though done by men. It takes full account of the responsibility of men the doers, but above all, recognises 'the rod and Him who hath appointed it.' We see exemplified over and over again in the world's history the tragic truth that the accumulated consequences of a nation's sins fall on the heads of a single generation. Slowly, drop by drop, the cup is filled. Slowly, moment by moment, the hand moves round the dial, and then come the crash and boom of the hammer on the deep-toned bell. Good men should pray not, 'Put up thyself into thy scabbard,' but, 'Gird Thy sword on Thy thigh, O thou most mighty . . . on behalf of truth and meekness and righteousness.'

III. The sheathing of the sword.

The passionate appeal in the text, which else is vain, has in large measure its satisfaction in the work of Christ.

God does not delight in punishment. He has provided a way. Christ bears the consequence of man's sin, the sense of alienation, the pains and sorrows, the death. He does not bear them for Himself. His bearing them accomplishes the ends at which punishment

aims, in expressing the divine hatred of sin and in subduing the heart. Trusting in Him, the sword does not fall on us. In some measure indeed it still does. But it is no longer a sword to smite, but a lancet to inflict a healing wound. And the worst punishment does not fall on us. God's sword was sheathed in Christ's breast. So trust in Him, then shall you have 'boldness in the day of judgment.'

THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

'Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of Hosts is His name: He shall thoroughly plead their cause.'—JER. l. 34.

AMONG the remarkable provisions of the Mosaic law there were some very peculiar ones affecting the next-of-kin. The nearest living blood relation to a man had certain obligations and offices to discharge, under certain contingencies, in respect of which he received a special name; which is sometimes translated in the Old Testament 'Redeemer,' and sometimes 'Avenger' of blood. What the etymological signification of the word may be is, perhaps, somewhat doubtful. It is taken by some authorities to come from a word meaning 'to set free.' But a consideration of the offices which the law prescribed for the 'Goel' is of more value for understanding the peculiar force of the metaphor in such a text as this, than any examination of the original meaning of the word. Jehovah is represented as having taken upon Himself the functions of the next-of-kin, and is the Kinsman-Redeemer of His people. The same thought recurs frequently in the Old Testament, especially in the second half of the prophecies of Isaiah, and it were much to be desired that the Revised Version had

adopted some means of showing an English reader the instances, since the expression suggests a very interesting and pathetic view of God's relation to His people.

I. Let me state briefly the qualifications and offices of the kinsman-redeemer, '*the Goel.*'

The qualifications may be all summed up in one—that he must be the nearest blood relation of the person whose Goel he was. He might be brother, or less nearly related, but this was essential, that of all living men, he was the most closely connected. That qualification has to be kept well in mind when thinking of the transference of the office to God in His relation to Israel, and through Israel to us.

Such being his qualification, what were his duties? Mainly three. The first was connected with property, and is thus stated in the words of the law, 'If thy brother be waxen poor, and sell some of his possession, then shall his *kinsman* that is next unto him come, and shall redeem that which his brother hath sold' (Lev. xxv. 25, R. V.). The Mosaic law was very jealous of large estates. The prophet pronounced a curse upon those who joined 'land to land, and field to field . . . that they may be alone in the midst of the earth.' One great purpose steadily kept in view in all the Mosaic land-laws was the prevention of the alienation of the land from its original holders, and of its accumulation in a few hands. The idea underlying the law was that of the tribal or family ownership—or rather occupancy, for God was the owner and Israel but a tenant—and not individual possession. That thought carries us back to a social state long since passed away, but of which traces are still left even among ourselves. It was carried out thoroughly in the law of Moses, however im-

perfectly in actual practice. The singular institution of the year of Jubilee operated, among other effects, to check the acquisition of large estates. It provided that land which had been alienated was to revert to its original occupants, and so, in substance, prohibited purchase and permitted only the lease of land for a maximum term of fifty years. We do not know how far its enactments were a dead letter, but their spirit and intention were obviously to secure the land of the tribe to the tribe for ever, to keep the territory of each distinct, to discourage the creation of a landowning class, with its consequent landless class, to prevent the extremes of poverty and wealth, and to perpetuate a diffused, and nearly uniform, modest wellbeing amongst a pastoral and agricultural community, and to keep all in mind that the land was 'not to be sold for ever, for it is Mine,' saith the Lord.

The obligation on the next-of-kin to buy back alienated property was quite as much imposed on him for the sake of the family as of the individual.

The second of his duties was to buy back a member of his family fallen into slavery. 'If a stranger or sojourner with thee be waxen rich, and thy brother be waxen poor beside him, and sell himself unto the stranger . . . after that he is sold, he may be redeemed; one of his brethren may redeem him.' The price was to vary according to the time which had to elapse before the year of Jubilee, when all slaves were necessarily set free. So Hebrew slavery was entirely unlike the thing called by the same name in other countries, and by virtue of this power of purchase at any time, which was vested in the nearest relative, taken along with the compulsory manumission of all 'slaves'

every fiftieth year, came to be substantially a voluntary engagement for a fixed time, which might be ended even before that time had expired, if compensation for the unexpired term was made to the master.

It is to be observed that this provision applied only to the case of a Hebrew who had sold himself. No other person could sell a man into slavery. And it applied only to the case of a Hebrew who had sold himself to a foreigner. No Jew was allowed to hold a Jew as a slave. 'If thy brother be waxen poor with thee, and sell himself unto thee, thou shalt not make him to serve as a bondservant; as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee' (Lev. xxv. 39, R. V.).

The last of the offices of the kinsman-redeemer was that of avenging the blood of a murdered relative. If a man were stricken to death, it became a solemn obligation to exact life for life, and the blood-feud incumbent on all the family was especially binding on the next-of-kin. The obligation shocks a modern mind, accustomed to relegate all punishment to the action of law which no criminal thinks of resisting. But customs and laws are unfairly estimated when the state of things which they regulated is forgotten or confused with that of to-day. The law of blood-feud among the Hebrews was all in the direction of restricting the wild justice of revenge, and of entrusting it to certain chosen persons out of the kindred of the murdered man. The savage vendetta was too deeply engrained in the national habits to be done away with altogether. All that was for the time possible was to check and systematise it, and this was done by the institution in question, which did not so much put the sword into the hand of the next-of-kin as strike it out of the hand of all the rest of the clan.

These, then, were the main parts of the duty of the Goel, the kinsman-redeemer—buying back the alienated land, purchasing the freedom of the man who had voluntarily sold himself as a slave, and avenging the slaying of a kinsman.

II. Notice the grand mysterious transference of this office to Jehovah.

This singular institution was gradually discerned to be charged with lofty meaning and to be capable of being turned into a dim shadowing of something greater than itself. You will find that God begins to be spoken of in the later portions of Scripture as the Kinsman-Redeemer. I reckon eighteen instances, of which thirteen are in the second half of Isaiah. The reference is, no doubt, mainly to the great deliverance from captivity in Egypt and Babylon, but the thought sweeps a much wider circle and goes much deeper down than these historical facts. There was in it some dim feeling that though God was separated from them by all the distance between finitude and infinitude, yet they were nearer to Him than to any one else; that the nearest living relation whom these poor persecuted Jews had was the Lord of Hosts, beneath whose wings they might come to trust. Therefore does the prophet kindle into rapture and triumphant confidence as he thinks that the Lord of Hosts, mighty, unspeakable, high above our thoughts, our words, or our praise, is Israel's Kinsman, and, therefore, their Redeemer. How profound a consciousness that man was made in the image of God, and that, in spite of all the gulf between finite and infinite, and the yet deeper gulf between sinful man and righteous God, He was closer to a poor struggling soul than even the dearest were, must have been at all events

dawning on the prophet who dared to think of the Holy One in the Heavens as Israel's Kinsman. No doubt, he was dwelling mostly on historical outward deliverances wrought for the nation, and his idea of Israel's kinship to God applied to the people, not to individuals, and meant chiefly that the nation had been chosen for God's. But still the thought must have been felt to be great and wonderful, and some faint apprehension of the yet deeper sense in which it is true that God is the next-of-kin to every soul and ready to be its Redeemer, would no doubt begin to be felt.

The deepening of the idea from a reference to external and national deliverances, and the large, dim hopes which clustered round it, may be illustrated by one or two significant instances. Take, for example, that mysterious and very beautiful utterance in the Book of Job, where the man, in the very depth of his despair, and just because there is not a human being that has any drop of pity for him, turns from earth, and striking confidence out of his very despair, like fire from flint, sees there his Kinsman-Redeemer. 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.' Men may mock him, friends may turn against him, the wife of his bosom may tempt him, comforters may pour vitriol instead of oil into his wounds, yet he, sitting on his dunghill there, poverty-stricken and desolate, knows that God is of kin to him, and will do the kinsman's part by him. The very metaphor implies that the divine intervention which he expects is to take place after his death. It was a dead man whose blood the Goel avenged. Thus the view which sees in the subsequent words a hope, however dim and undefined, of an experience of a divine manifestation on his behalf beyond the grave is the only one which gives its

full force to the central idea of the passage, as well as to the obscure individual expressions. Most strikingly, then, he goes on to say, carrying out the allusion, 'and that he shall stand at the last upon the dust.' Little did it boot the murdered man, lying there stark, with the knife in his bosom, that the murderer should be slain by the swift justice of his kinsman-avenger, but Job felt that, in some mysterious way, God would appear for him, after he had been laid in the dust, and that he would somehow share in the gladness of His manifestation—for he believes that 'without his flesh' he will see God, 'whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.' Large and mysterious hopes are gathering round the metaphor, which flash some light into the darkness of the grave, and give to the troubled soul the assurance that when life with all its troubles is past, and flesh has seen corruption, the inmost personal being of every man who commits his cause to God will behold Him coming forth his Kinsman-Redeemer.

Another illustration of the hopes which gathered round this image is found in the great psalm which prophesies of the true King of Peace, in language too wide for any poetical licence to warrant if intended only to describe a Jewish king (Ps. lxxii. 14). The universal dominion of this great King is described in terms which, though they may be partly referred to the Jewish monarchy at its greatest expansion, sweep far beyond its bounds in exulting anticipation that 'all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him.' The reason for this world-wide dominion is not military power, as was the case with the warrior kings of old, who bound nations together for a little while in an artificial unity with iron chains, but His dominion is univer-

sal, '*for* He shall deliver the needy when he crieth . . . He shall *redeem* their souls from oppression and violence, and precious shall their blood be in His sight.' Two of the functions of the Kinsman-Redeemer are here united. He buys back slaves from their tyrannous masters, and He avenges their shed blood. And because His Kingdom is a kingdom of gentle pity and loving help, because He is of the same blood with His subjects, and brings liberty to the captives, therefore it is universal and everlasting. For the strongest thing in all the world is love, and He who can staunch men's wounds, and will hear their cries and help them, will rule them with authority which conquerors cannot wield.

This universal King, the kinsman and the sovereign of all the needy, is not God. A human figure is rising before the prophet-psalmist's eye, whose meekness as well as His majesty, and whose kingdom as well as His redeeming power, seem to pass beyond human limits. Divine offices seem to be devolved on a man's shoulders. Dim hopes are springing which point onwards. So that great psalm leads us a step further.

III. See the perfect fulfilment of this divine office by the man Christ Jesus.

Job's anticipation and the psalmist's rapturous vision are fulfilled in the Incarnate Word, in whom God comes near to us all and makes Himself kindred to our flesh, that He may discharge all those blessed offices, of redeeming from slavery, of recovering our alienated inheritance, and of guarding our lives, which demand at once divine power and human nearness. Christ is our Kinsman. True, the divine nature and the human are nearly allied, so that even apart from the Incarnation, men may feel that none is so truly and closely akin to

them as their Father in Heaven is. But how much more blessed than even that kinship is the consanguinity of Christ, who is doubly of kin to each soul of man, both because in His true manhood He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and because in His divinity He is nearer to us than the closest human kindred can ever be. By both He comes so near to us that we may clasp Him by our faith, and rest upon Him, and have Him for our nearest friend, our brother. He is nearer to each of us than our dearest is. He loves us with the love of kindred, and can fill our hearts and wills, and help our weakness in better, more inward ways than all sympathy and love of human hearts can do. Between the atoms of the densest of material bodies there is an interspace of air, as is shown by the fact that everything is compressible if you can find the force sufficient to compress it. That is to say, in the material universe no particle touches another. And so in the spiritual region, there is an awful film of separation between each of us and all others, however closely we may be united. We each live on our own little island in the deep, 'with echoing straits between us thrown.' We have a solemn consciousness of personality, of responsibility unshared by any, of a separate destiny parting us from our dearest. Arms may be twined, but they must be unlinked some day, and each in turn must face the awful solitude of death, as each has really faced that scarcely less awful solitude of life, alone. But 'he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and our kinsman, Christ, will come so near to us, that we shall be in Him and He in us, one spirit and one life. He is your nearest relation, nearer than husband, wife, parent, brother, sister, or friend. He is nearer to you than your very selves. He

is your better self. That is His qualification for His office.

Because He is man's kinsman, He buys back His enslaved brethren. The bondage from which 'one of His brethren' might 'redeem' the Israelite was a voluntary bondage into which he had sold himself. And such is our slavery. None can rob us of our freedom but ourselves. The world and the flesh and the devil cannot put their chains on us unless our own wills hold out our hands for the manacles.

And, alas! it is often an unsuspected slavery. 'How sayest thou, ye shall be made free. We were never in bondage to any man,' boasted the angry disputants with Christ. And if they had lifted up their eyes they might have seen from the Temple courts in which they stood, the citadel full of Roman soldiers, and perhaps the golden eagles gleaming in the sunshine on the loftiest battlements. Yet with that strange power of ignoring disagreeable facts they dared to assert their freedom. 'Never in bondage to any man!'—what about Egypt, and Assyria, and Babylon? Had there never been an Antiochus? Was Rome a reality? Did it lay no yoke on them? Was it all a dream?

Some of us are just as foolish, and try as desperately to annihilate facts by ignoring them, and to make ourselves free by passionately denying that we are slaves. But 'he that committeth sin is the slave of sin.' That sounds a paradox. I am master of my own actions, you may say, and never freer than when I break the bonds of right and duty and choose to do what is contrary to them, for no reason on earth but because I choose. That is liberty, emancipation from the burdensome restraints which your narrow preaching about law and

conscience would impose. Yes, you are masters of your actions, and your sinful actions very soon become masters of you. Do we not know that that is true? You fall into, or walk into a habit, and then it gets the mastery of you, and you cannot get rid of it. Whosoever sets his foot upon that slippery inclined plane of wrong-doing, after he has gone a little way, gravitation is too much for him and away he goes down the hill. 'Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.' Did you ever try to kill a bad habit, a vice? Did you find it easy work? Was it not your master? You thought that a chain no stronger than a spider's web was round your wrist till you tried to break it; and then you found it a chain of adamant. Many men who boast themselves free are 'tied and bound with the cords of their sins.'

Dreaming of freedom, you have sold yourself, and that 'for nought.' Is that not true, tragically true?

What have you made out of sin? Is the game worth the candle? Will it continue to be so? Ye shall be redeemed without money, for Jesus Christ laid down His life for you and me, that by His death we might receive forgiveness and deliverance from the power of sin. And so your Kinsman, nearer to you than all else, has bought you back. Do not refuse the offered emancipation, but 'if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.' Be not like the spiritless slaves, for whose servile choice the law provided, who had rather remain bond than go out free. Surely when Christ calls you to liberty, you will not turn from Him to the tyrannous masters whom you have served, and, like the Hebrew slave, let them fasten you to their door-posts with their awl through your ear. Do you hug your chains and prefer your bondage?

Your Kinsman-Redeemer brings back your squandered

inheritance, which is God. God is the only possession that makes a man rich. He alone is worth calling 'my portion.' It is only when we have God in our hearts, God in our heads, God in our souls, God in our life—it is only when we love Him, and think about Him, and obey Him, and bring our characters into harmony with Him, and so possess Him—it is only then that we become truly rich. No other possession corresponds to our capacities so as to fill up all our needs and satisfy all our being. No other possession passes into our very substance and becomes inseparable from ourselves. So the mystical fervour of the psalmist's devotion spoke a simple prose truth when he exclaimed, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.'

We have squandered our inheritance. We have sinned away fellowship with God. We have flung away our true wealth, 'wasted our substance in riotous living.' And here is our Elder Brother, our nearest relative, who has always been with the Father; but who, instead of grudging the prodigals their fatted calf and their hearty welcome when they come back, has Himself, by the sacrifice of Himself, won for them the inheritance, its earnest in the possession of God's spirit here and its completion in the broad fields of 'the inheritance of the saints in light,' the entire fruition and possession of the divine in the life to come. 'If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.'

Your Kinsman-Redeemer will keep your lives under His care, and be ready to plead your cause. 'He that touches you, touches the apple of Mine eye.' 'He reproved kings for their sake, saying, Touch not Mine anointed.' Not in vain does the cry go up to Him, 'Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints,'—and if no

apparent retribution has followed, and if often His servant's blood seems to have been shed in vain, still we know that it has often been the seed of the Church, and that He who puts our tears into His bottle will not count our blood less precious in His sight. So we may rest confident that our Kinsman-Redeemer will charge Himself with pleading our cause and intervening in our behalf, that He will compass us about with His protection, and that we are knit so close to Him that our woes and foes are His, and that we cannot die as long as He lives.

So, dear brethren, be sure of this, that if only you will take Christ for your Saviour and brother, your Helper and Friend, if only you will rest yourself upon that complete sacrifice which He has made for the sins of the world, He will give you liberty, and restore your lost inheritance, and your blood shall be precious in His sight, and He will keep His hand around you and preserve you; and finally will bring you into His home and yours. 'In Him we have redemption through His blood,' and He comes to every one of you now, even through my poor lips, with His ancient word of merciful invitation: 'Behold! I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy transgressions. Turn unto Me, for I have redeemed thee.'

'AS SODOM'

'Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 2. And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 3. For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, till he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. 4. And it came to pass, in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about. 5. So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. 6. And in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. 7. Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans were by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain. 8. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. 9. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him. 10. And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. 11. Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.'—JER. lii. 1–11.

THIS account of the fall of Jerusalem is all but identical with that in 2 Kings xxv. It was probably taken thence by some editor of Jeremiah's prophecies, perhaps Baruch, who felt the appropriateness of appending to these the verification of them in that long-foretold and disbelieved judgment.

The absence of every expression of emotion is most striking. In one sentence the wrath of God is pointed to as the cause of all; and, for the rest, the tragic facts which wrung the writer's heart are told in brief, passionless sentences, which sound liker the voice of the recording angel than that of a man who had lived through the misery which he recounts. The Book of Lamentations weeps and sobs with the grief of the devout Jew; but the historian smothers feeling while he tells of God's righteous judgment.

Zedekiah owed his throne to 'the king of Babylon,' and, at first, was his obedient vassal, himself going to Babylon (Jer. li. 59) and swearing allegiance (Ezek. xvii. 13). But rebellion soon followed, and the perjured young king once more pursued the fatal, fascinating policy of alliance with Egypt. There could be but one end to that madness, and, of course, the Chaldean forces soon appeared to chastise this presumptuous little monarch, who dared to defy the master of the world. Our narrative curtails its account of Zedekiah's reign, bringing into strong relief only the two facts of his following Jehoiakim's evil ways, and his rebellion against Babylon. But behind the rash, ignorant young man, it sees God working, and traces all the insane bravado by which he was ruining his kingdom and himself to God's 'wrath,' not thereby diminishing Zedekiah's responsibility for his own acts, but declaring that his being 'given over to a reprobate mind' was the righteous divine punishment for past sin.

An eighteen months' agony is condensed into three verses (Jer. lii. 4–6), in which the minute care to specify dates pathetically reveals the depth of the impression which the first appearance of the besieging army made, and the deeper wound caused by the city's fall. The memory of these days has not faded yet, for both are still kept as fasts by the synagogue. We look with the narrator's eye at the deliberate massing of the immense besieging force drawing its coils round the doomed city, like a net round a deer, and mark with him the piling of the mounds, and the erection on them of siege-towers. We hear of no active siege operations till the final assault. Famine was Nebuchadnezzar's best general. 'Sitting down they watched' *her* 'there,' and grimly

waited till hunger became unbearable. We can fill up much of the outline in this narrative from the rest of Jeremiah, which gives us a vivid and wretched picture of imbecility, divided counsels, and mad hatred of God's messenger, blind refusal to see facts, and self-confidence which no disaster could abate. And, all the while, the monstrous serpent was slowly tightening its folds round the struggling, helpless rabbit. We have to imagine all the misery.

The narrative hurries on to its close. What wide-spread and long-drawn-out privation that one sentence covers: 'The famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people'! Lamentations is full of the cries of famished children and mothers who eat the fruit of their own bodies. At last, on the memorable black day, the ninth of the fourth month (say July), 'a breach was made,' and the Chaldean forces poured in through it. Jeremiah xxxix. 3 tells the names of the Babylonian officers who 'sat in the middle gate' of the Temple, polluting it with their presence. There seems to have been no resistance from the enfeebled, famished people; but apparently some of the priests were slain in the sanctuary, perhaps in the act of defending it from the entrance of the enemy. The Chaldeans would enter from the north, and, while they were establishing themselves in the Temple, Zedekiah 'and all the men of war' fled, stealing out of the city by a covered way between two walls, on the south side, and leaving the city to the conqueror, without striking a blow. They had talked large when danger was not near; but braggarts are cowards, and they thought now of nothing but their own worthless lives. Then, as always, the men who feared God feared nothing else, and the men who scoffed at the

day of retribution, when it was far off, were unmanned with terror when it dawned.

The investment had not been complete on the southern side, and the fugitives got away across Kedron and on to the road to Jericho, their purpose, no doubt, being to put the Jordan between them and the enemy. One can picture that stampede down the rocky way, the anxious looks cast backwards, the confusion, the weariness, the despair when the rush of the pursuers overtook the famine-weakened mob. In sight of Jericho, which had witnessed the first onset of the irresistible desert-hardened host under Joshua, the last king of Israel, deserted by his army, was 'taken in their pits,' as hunters take a wild beast. The march to Riblah, in the far north, would be full of indignities and of physical suffering. The soldiers of that 'bitter and hasty' nation would not spare him one insult or act of cruelty, and he had a tormentor within worse than they. 'Why did I not listen to the prophet? What a fool I have been! If I had only my time to come over again, how differently I would do!' The miserable self-reproaches, which shoot their arrows into our hearts when it is too late, would torture Zedekiah, as they will sooner or later do to all who did not listen to God's message while there was yet time. The sinful, mad past kept him company on one hand; and, on the other, there attended him a dark, if doubtful, future. He knew that he was at the disposal of a fierce conqueror, whom he had deeply incensed, and who had little mercy. 'What will become of me when I am face to face with Nebuchadnezzar? Would that I had kept subject to him!' A past gone to ruin, a present honey-combed with gnawing remorse and dread, a future threatening, problematical, but sure to be penal

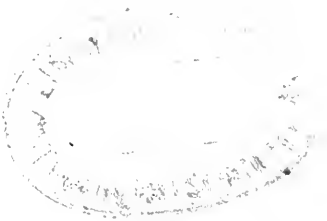
—these were what this foolish young king had won by showing his spirit and despising Jeremiah's warnings. It is always a mistake to fly in the face of God's commands. All sin is folly, and every evildoer might say with poor Robert Burns:

'I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear.'

Nebuchadnezzar was in Riblah, away up in the north, waiting the issue of the campaign. Zedekiah was nothing to him but one of the many rebellious vassals of whom he had to make an example lest rebellion should spread, and who was especially guilty because he was Nebuchadnezzar's own nominee, and had sworn allegiance. Policy and his own natural disposition reinforced by custom dictated his barbarous punishment meted to the unfortunate kinglet of the petty kingdom that had dared to perk itself up against his might. How little he knew that he was the executioner of God's decrees! How little the fact that he was so, diminished his responsibility for his cruelty! The savage practice of blinding captive kings, so as to make them harmless and save all trouble with them, was very common. Zedekiah was carried to Babylon, and thus was fulfilled Ezekiel's enigmatical prophecy, 'I will bring him to Babylon, . . . yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there' (Ezek. xii. 13).

The fall of Jerusalem should teach us that a nation is a moral whole, capable of doing evil and of receiving retribution, and not a mere aggregation of individuals. It should teach us that transgression does still, though not so directly or certainly as in the case of Israel, sap

the strength of kingdoms; and that to-day, as truly as of old, 'righteousness exalteth a nation.' It should accustom us to look on history as not only the result of visible forces, but as having behind it, and reaching its end through the visible forces, the unseen hand of God. For Christians, the vision of the Apocalypse contains the ultimate word on 'the philosophy of history.' It is 'the Lamb before the Throne,' who opens the roll with the seven seals, and lets the powers of whom it speaks loose for their march through the world. It should teach us God's long-suffering patience and loving efforts to escape the necessity of smiting, and also God's rigid justice, which will not shrink from smiting when all these efforts have failed.



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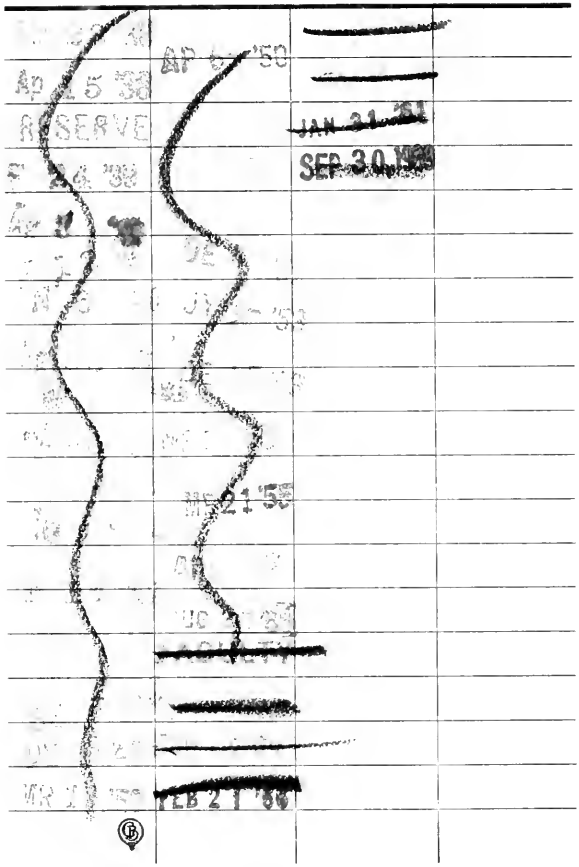

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B - Preaching

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